



Spurgeon's Sermons

The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit

By Rev. C. H. Spurgeon

Volume XXVIII



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SPURGEON'S SERMONS

VOLUME XXVIII

THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE PULPIT

BY

CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON
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To
THE ONE GOD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH,
IN THE TRINITY OF HIS SACRED PERSONS,
BE ALL HONOUR AND GLORY,
WORLD WITHOUT END,
AMEN.

TO THE GLORIOUS FATHER,
AS THE COVENANT GOD OF ISRAEL;

TO THE GRACIOUS SON,
THE REDEEMER OF HIS PEOPLE;

TO THE HOLY GHOST,
THE AUTHOR OF SANCTIFICATION;

BE EVERLASTING PRAISE FOR THAT GOSPEL OF
THE FREE GRACE OF GOD,
HEREIN PROCLAIMED UNTO MEN.

CONTENTS

1637 The Beginning of Months – Ex. 12:1-2	5
1638 Men without Heart – Deut. 29:4.....	25
1639 Acceptable Service – Heb. 12:28-29.....	46
1640 The Touch – Mark 5:30-31.....	67
1641 Great Spoil – Ps. 119:162	80
1642 Verily, Verily – John 5:24	100
1643 The Lord’s Trial – Mark 14:64.....	120
1644 Christ Before Pilate – John 18:38.....	141
1645 Christ Before Herod – Luke 23:8-9	162
1646 A Question and Answer – John 6:66-69	182
1647 The Dream of Pilate’s Wife – Matt. 27:19.....	202
1648 Guilty of Christ’s Death – Matt. 27:24-25.....	223
1649 Freshness – Job 29:20; Ps. 92:10	243
1650 God’s Fatherly Pity – Ps. 103:13.....	263
1651 A Delusion Dispelled – Ezek. 14:20.....	281
1652 The Singing Pilgrim – Ps. 119:54	302
1653 The Resurrection – 2 Tim. 2:8	322
1654 “At Your Word” – Luke 5:5	343
1655 The Guest Detained – Luke 24:28-29.....	363
1656 Solace in Affliction – Ps. 119:89-92.....	384

1657 My Hourly Prayer – Ps. 119:117	404
1658 Healed or Deluded? – Jer. 8:11	425
1659 A Feast for the Upright – Ps. 84:11-12.....	445
1660 Perpetuity of the Law – Matt. 5:18.....	466
1661 Praying and Pleading – Jer. 14:7-9	487
1662 Indwelling of the Holy Spirit – John 7:38-39	508
1663 The True Gospel – 2 Cor. 4:3-4.....	528
1664 “Jehovah-Rophi” – Exod. 15:26	549
1665 The Exceeding Riches of Grace – Ephesians 2:7....	570
1666 First Recorded Words of Jesus – Luke 2:48-49	591
1667 “Love and I” – A Mystery – John 17:26	612
1668 The Still Small Voice – 1 Kings 19:12-13.....	632
1669 Teaching Befitting the Hearers – Mark 4:33-34	654
1670 “There is a Lion!” – Prov. 22:13; 26:13	675
1671 The Value of the Believer – Isa. 43:4.....	696
1672 The Voice Behind You – Isa. 30:21.....	717
1673 Who is This? – Jer. 30:21.....	738
1674 Brought Up from the Pit – Ps. 40:1-3.....	759
1675 Out of Egypt – Matt. 2:14-15.....	780
1676 Despair Denounced – Ezek. 37:11-13.....	801
1677 A Great Mistake – Rev. 3:17-18.....	822
1678 Samaritan Woman’s Mission – John 4:27-30	843
1679 One War Over, Another Begun – Jud. 6:22-24.....	864

1680 The Weepers – Judges 2:4-5	885
1681 Messiah's Glorious Work – Dan. 9:24	906
1682 Ask and Have – James 4:2-3.....	927
1683 The Great Cross-Bearer – Mark 15:20	948
1684 “Feed My Lambs” – John 21:15	969
1685 God's Non-Remembrance of Sin – Jer. 31:34	990
1686 On the Lake of Galilee – Matt. 8:27.....	1011
1687 The Law Written on the Heart – Jer. 31:33	1032
1688 Stand Fast – Col. 1:23.....	1053
1689 Mount Zion – Heb. 12:22-24	1074
1690 Chariots of Iron – Judges 1:19-20.....	1095
1691 Christ's Word with You – Matt. 11:28.....	1116
1692 “Without Carefulness” – 1 Cor. 7:32.....	1137
1693 That Horrible East Wind – Col. 3:15	1157
1694 The Use of the Bow – 2 Sam. 1:17-18.....	1178
1695 The Orphan's Father – Hos. 14:3.....	1191
1696 The Bird Escaped from the Snare – Ps. 124:7.....	1204
1697 The Word of a King – Eccl. 8:4	1218

1637 THE BEGINNING OF MONTHS – EX. 12:1-2

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, January 1st, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

And the Lord spoke unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, “This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.” — Exodus 12:1-2

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Exodus 12]

IN ALL PROBABILITY up to that time the year had been supposed to begin in the autumn. The question has been raised at what season of the year did God create man, and it has been decided by many that it must have been in autumn, so that when Adam was placed in the garden he might at once find fruits ripe and ready for his use. It has not seemed probable that he would have begun his career while as yet all fruits were raw and green; therefore many have concluded that the first year of human history began in the time of harvest, when fruits were mellowed for man’s food. For this reason, perhaps, in the old times the new year began when the feast of harvest had been celebrated. Here, at the point of the Exodus, by a decree of God, the commencement of the year was altered, and so far as Israel was concerned the opening of the year was fixed for the time of our spring—in the month called Abib or Nisan. We

know that a little before the barley was in the ear (see Exodus 9:31), and on the Sabbath after the Passover, the produce of the earth was so far advanced that the first fruits were offered, and a sheaf of new barley was waved before the Lord. Of course, when I speak of spring, and then of ears of barley, you must remember the difference of climate, for in that warm region the seasons are far in advance of ours. You must pardon me if my ideas should become a little mixed, you can correct them easily at your leisure. From the time when the Lord saved His people from destruction by passing over them, the ecclesiastical year began in the month of Abib, in which the Passover was celebrated. The jubilee year was not altered, but began in the autumnal equinox. The Jews seem to have had two or three beginnings of the year in relation to different purposes, but the ecclesiastical year, the great year by which Israel reckoned its existence, commenced from then on in the month Abib, when the Lord brought His people out with a high hand and an outstretched arm.

It is with God to change times and seasons as He pleases, and He has done so for great commemorative purposes. The change of the Sabbath is on the same manner, for whereas the day of rest was formerly the seventh, it is now merged in the Lord's Day, which is the first day of the week. As Herbert says, "He did unhinge the day," and He set the Sabbath on golden hinges by consecrating the day of His resurrection. To every man God makes such a change of times and seasons when He deals with him in a way of grace, for all things are become new within him, and therefore he begins a new chronology. Some of us used to think our birthday fell at a certain time of the year, but now we regard with much more delight another day as our true birthday, since on that second natal day we began truly to live. Our calendar has been altered and amended by a deed of divine grace

This morning I want to bring to your mind the fact, that, just as the people of Israel when God gave them the Passover had a complete shifting and changing of all their dates, and began their year on quite a different day, so when God gives to His people to eat the spiritual Passover there takes place in their chronology a very wonderful change. Saved men and women date from the dawn of their true life, not from their first birthday, but from the day wherein they were born again of the Spirit of God, and entered into the knowledge and enjoyment of spiritual things. The Passover is, as we all know, a type of the great work of our redemption by the blood of Jesus, and it represents the personal application of it to each believer. When we perceive the Lord's act of passing over us because of Christ's atoning sacrifice, then it is that we begin to live, and from that day we date all future events.

So this morning we shall first *describe the event*. Secondly, *mention varieties of its recurrence*, and thirdly, *consider in what light the day of this grand event is to be regarded* according to the law of the Lord.

I. First, then, let us **DESCRIBE THIS REMARKABLE EVENT**, which was to stand at the head of the Jewish year, and indeed, at the commencement of all Israelite chronology.

First, this event was *an act of salvation by blood*. You know how the elders and heads of families each one took the lamb and shut it up, that they might examine it carefully. Having chosen a lamb without blemish, in the prime of its life, they kept it by itself as a separated and consecrated creature, and after four days they slew it, and caught its blood in a basin. When this was done they took hyssop and dipped it in the blood, and sprinkled the lintel and the two side posts of their houses. By this means the houses of Israel were preserved on that dark and dreadful night, when with unsheathed sword the angel of vengeance sped through every street of Pharaoh's

domain and slew the first-born of all the land, both of men and of cattle. You will remember, dear friends, the time when you yourselves perceived that God's vengeance was out against sin, you can even now remember your terror and trembling. Many of us can never forget the memorable time when we first discovered that there was a way of deliverance from the wrath of God. Memory may drop all else from her enfeebled grasp, but this is engraved on the palms of her hands. The mode of our deliverance is before us in the type as Moses describes it. The angel could not be restrained, his wing could not be bound, and his sword could not be sheathed, he must go forth, and he must smite. He must smite *us* among the rest, for sin was upon us, and there must be no partiality, "the soul that sins it shall die." But do you remember when you discovered God's new way, His blessed ordinance by which, without abrogating the destroying law, He brought in a glorious saving clause by which we were delivered?

The clause was this,—that if another could be found who could and would suffer instead of us, and if there could be clear evidence that this surety did so suffer, then the sight of that evidence should be enough for our deliverance. Do you remember your joy at that discovery? For, if so, you can enter into the feelings of the Israelites when they understood that God would accept an unblemished lamb in the place of their first-born, and if the blood was displayed upon the door post as the clear evidence that a sacrifice had died, and a substitute had suffered, then the angel would know that in that house his work was done, and he might therefore pass over that habitation. The avenger was to demand a life, but the life was already paid, for there was the blood-mark which proved it, and the exactor might go on his way. It was the night of God's Passover, not because the execution of vengeance was left undone in the houses passed over, but for a reason of the

opposite kind—because in those houses the death-blow had been struck, and the victim had died, and as the penalty could not be exacted twice, that family was clear.

I do not know whether there is any truth in the statement of a correspondent that whatever part of the earth the lightning once strikes it never strikes it again. But whether it is so or not, it is certain that wherever the lightning of God's vengeance has once struck the sinner's substitute it will not strike the sinner. The best preservative for the Israelite's house was this—vengeance had struck there and could not strike again. There was the insurance mark, the blood-streak. Death had been there, no matter though it had fallen on a harmless lamb, it had fallen on a victim of God's own appointment, and in His esteem it had fallen upon His Christ, the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. Because the claims of retribution had been fully met there was no further demand, and Israel was secure. This is my eternal confidence, and here is my soul's sweet hymn—

“If You have my discharge procured,
And freely in my place endured
The whole of wrath divine—
Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hands
And then, again, at mine!
Turn then, my soul, unto your rest.
The merits of your great High Priest
Have bought your liberty—
Trust in His efficacious blood,
Nor fear your banishment from God,
Since Jesus died for thee.”

It was to me the beginning of my life, that day in which I discovered that judgment was passed upon me in the person of my Lord and that there is therefore now no condemnation to me. The law demands death—"The soul that sins, it shall die." Lo, there is the death it asks, and more. Christ, my Lord, has died, died in my place, as it is written, "Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree." Such a sacrifice is more than even the most rigorous law could demand. "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Therefore do we sit securely within doors, desiring no guard outside to drive away the destroyer, for, when God sees the blood of Jesus He will pass over us. "In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer. 23:6). I say again, it was the beginning of life to me when I saw Jesus as dying in my place. I beheld the first sight that was worth beholding, let all the rest be darkness and as the shadow of death. Then did my soul rejoice when I understood and accepted the substitutionary sacrifice of the appointed Redeemer. That is the first view of this event—the blood of sprinkling made Israel secure.

Secondly, that night *they received refreshment from the lamb*. Being saved by its blood, the believing households sat down and fed upon the lamb. They never ate as they ate that night. Those who spiritually understood the symbol must have partaken of every morsel with a mysterious awe mingled with an unfathomable delight. I am sure there must have been a singular seriousness about the table as they stood there eating in haste, and especially if every now and then they were startled with the shrieks that rose from every house in the land of Egypt, because of the slain of the Lord. It was a solemn feast, a meal of mingled hope and mystery. Do you remember, brothers and

sisters, when you first you fed upon Christ, when that hungry spirit of yours enjoyed the first morsel of that food of the soul? It was dainty fare, was it not? It was better than angels' bread, for—

“Never did angels taste above
Redeeming grace and dying love!”

I hope you have never risen from that table, but are daily feeding upon Jesus. It is a very instructive fact that we do not go to our Lord's table, like Israel, to eat in haste, with a staff in our hand. We come there to recline at ease with our heads on His bosom, reposing in His love. Christ Jesus is the daily bread of our spirits.

Observe that the refreshment which Israel ate that night was the lamb “roasted with fire.” The best refreshment to a troubled heart is the suffering Savior, the Lamb roasted with fire. A poor sinner under a sense of sin goes to a place of worship, and he hears Christ preached as an example. This may be useful to the saint, but it is scant help to the poor sinner. He cries, “That is true, but it rather condemns than comforts me.” It is not food for him; he needs the lamb roasted with fire, Christ his substitute, Christ suffering in his place. We hear a great deal about the beauty of Christ's moral character, and assuredly our blessed Lord deserves to be highly exalted on that score. But that is not the aspect under which He is food to a soul conscious of sin. The chief relish about our Lord Jesus to a penitent sinner is His sin-bearing and His agonies in that capacity. We need the suffering Savior, the Christ of Gethsemane, the Christ of Golgotha and Calvary, Christ shedding His blood in the sinner's place, and bearing for us the fire of God's wrath. Nothing short of this will suffice to be

meat for a hungry heart. Keep this back and you starve the child of God.

We are told in the chapter that they were not to eat the lamb raw. Alas! There are some who try to do this with Christ, for they preach a half-atoning sacrifice. They would make Him in His Person and in His character to be meat for their souls, but they have small liking for His Passion, and they cast His Atonement into the background, or represent it to be an ineffectual expiation which does not secure any soul from vengeance. What is this but to devour a raw Christ? I will not touch their half-roasted lamb. I will have nothing to do with their half substitution, their half-complete redemption. No, no, give me a Savior who has borne all my sins in His body, and so has been roasted with fire to the fullest. “It is finished,” is the most charming note in all Calvary’s music. “It is finished,” the fire has passed upon the Lamb. He has borne the whole of the wrath that was due to His people, this is the royal dish of the feast of love.

What a multitude of teachers there are who must necessarily have the Lamb boiled with water, though the Scripture says, “Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water.” I have heard it said that a great number of sermons are about Christ and about the gospel, but yet neither Christ nor His gospel is preached in them, if so, the preachers present the lamb boiled in the water of their own thoughts and speculations and notions. Now, the mischief of this boiling process is that the water takes away a good deal from the meat. Philosophical discourses upon the Lord Jesus take away much of the essence and virtue of His person, offices, work, and glory. The real juice and vital nutriment of His glorious Word is carried off by interpretations which do not explain, but explain away. How many boil out the soul of the gospel by their carnal wisdom! What is worse still, when meat is boiled, it is not only that the

meat gets into the water, but the water gets into the meat, and so, what truth these gospel-boilers do hand out to us is boiled with error, and you receive from them dishes made up partly of God's truth and partly of men's imaginations. We hear in some measure solid gospel and in larger measure mere watery reasoning. When certain divines preach the atonement, it is not substitution pure and simple; one hardly knows what it is. Their atonement is not the vicarious sacrifice, but a performance of something they are long in defining. They have a theory which is like the relics of meat after months of boiling, all strings and fibers. All manner of schemes are tried to extract the marrow and fatness from the grand soul-satisfying doctrine of substitution, which to my mind is the choicest truth that can ever be brought forth for the food of souls. I cannot make out why so many divines are afraid of the shedding of blood for the remission of sin, and must stew down the most important of all the truths of revelation. No, no. As the type could only be correct when the lamb was roasted with fire, so the gospel is not truly set forth unless we describe our Lord Jesus in His sufferings for His people, and those sufferings in the place of sinners, presenting absolutely and literally a substitution for them. I will have no dilution, it is substitution—"He bore our sins." He was made sin for us. "The chastisement of our peace was upon Him and by His stripes we are healed." We must have no mystifying of this plain truth, it must not be "boiled at all with water," but we must have Christ in His sufferings fresh from the fire.

Now, this lamb they were to eat, and the whole of it. Not a morsel must be left. Oh that you and I would never cut and divide Christ so as to choose one part of Him and leave another. Let not a bone of Him be broken, but let us take in a whole Christ up to the full measure of our capacity. Prophet, Priest and King, Christ Divine and Christ human, Christ loving and

living, Christ dying, Christ risen, Christ ascended, Christ coming again, Christ triumphant over all His foes—the whole Lord Jesus Christ is ours. We must not reject a single particle of what is revealed concerning Him, but must feed upon it all as we are able.

That night Israel had to feed upon the lamb then and there. They might not put by a portion for tomorrow. They must consume the whole in some way or other. Oh, my brothers and sisters, we need a whole Christ at this very moment. Let us receive Him in His entirety. Oh for a splendid appetite and fine powers of digestion, so as to receive into my inmost soul the Lord's Christ just as I find Him. May you and I never think lightly of our Lord under any light or in any one of His offices. All that you now know and all that you can find out concerning Christ you should now believe, appreciate, feed upon and rejoice in. Make the most of all that is in the word concerning your Lord. Let Him enter into your being to become part and parcel of yourself. If you do this, the day in which you feed on Jesus will be the first day of your life, its day of days, the day from which you date all that follows. If once you have fed upon Christ Jesus, you will never forget it in time or in eternity. That was the second event which was celebrated in each succeeding Passover.

The third event was *the purification of their houses from leaven*, for that was to go in a most important way side by side with the sprinkling of the blood and the eating of the lamb. They were told that they must not eat leaven for seven days, for whoever did partake of leaven should be cut off from Israel. It shows the deep importance of this purification, that it is put in equal position with the sprinkling of the blood. At any rate, it might not be separated from it upon pain and penalty that he who divided the two should, himself be divided from the congregation of Israel. Now, it is always a pity when we are

preaching justification by faith, to bring in sanctification as to make it a part of justification. But it is also a horrible error when you are preaching justification, to preach it as to deny the absolute necessity of sanctification, for the two are joined together by the Lord. There must be eating of the lamb as well as the sprinkling of the blood. And there must be the purging out of the old leaven, as well as the sprinkling of the blood and the eating of the lamb. Very carefully the Jewish householder looked into every closet, corner, drawer, and cupboard, to sweep out every crumb of stale bread, and if they had any bread in storage, even if it was new and they intended to eat it, they must throw it all away, for there must not be a particle of leaven in the same house with the lamb. When you and I first came to Christ, what a sweep there was of the leaven. I know I was clean delivered from the leaven of the Pharisees, for all trust in my own good works went, even the last crumb of it. All confidence in rites and ceremonies must go too. I have not a crust left of either of these two sour and corrupt confidences at the present moment, and I wish never to taste that old leaven anymore. Some are always chewing at that leaven, glorying in their own prayers, and alms, and ceremonies. But when Christ comes in, this leaven all goes out. Moreover, the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy, must be cleared out. “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputes not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” Guile must go, or guilt will not go. The Lord sweeps the cunning out of His people, the craftiness, the deceit; He makes them true before His face. They wish that they were as clear of every sin as they are clear from insincerity. They once tried to dwell before the Lord with double dealing, pretending to be what they were not, but as soon as they ate of Christ and the blood was sprinkled, they humbled themselves in truth, and laid bare their sinnership, and stood before God

as they were, with their hypocrisy torn away. Christ has not saved the man who still trusts in falsehood. You cannot feed on Christ and at the same time hold a lie in your right hand by vain confidence in yourself, or by love of sin. Self and sin must go. But oh what a day it is when the old leaven is put out—we shall never forget it! This month is the beginning of months, the first month of the year to us, when the Spirit of truth purges out the spirit of falsehood.

A fourth point in the Passover is not to be forgotten. On the Passover night there came, as the result of the former things, *a wonderful, glorious, and mighty deliverance*. That night every Israelite received promise of immediate emancipation, and as soon as the morning dawned, he left the house in which he had sheltered during the night, and leaving his home, he left Egypt too. He left forever the brick kilns, washed the brick-earth for the last time from his hands, looked down on the yoke he used to carry when he worked amid the clay, and said, “I have done with you.” He looked at every Egyptian taskmaster, remembered how often he had struck him with the stick, and he rejoiced that he would never be struck again, for there he was at his feet begging him to be gone lest all Egypt should die. Oh what joy! They marched out with their unleavened bread still on their backs, for they had some days in which they were still to eat it, and I think before the seventh day of unleavened bread was over they had reached the Red Sea. Still eating unleavened bread they went down into the depths of the Red Sea, and still with no flavor of leaven in their mouths, they stood on its shore to sing unto the Lord the great Hallelujah because He had triumphed gloriously, and the horse and his rider had been cast into the sea. Do you remember when the Lord purged you from the love of sin, from trust in self, and when He brought you clean out, and set you free, and said, “Go on to the promised rest, go on to Canaan”? Do you remember

when you saw your sins drowned forever, never to rise in judgment against you—not merely your destruction prevented, not merely your soul fed with the finest food, not merely your heart and your house cleansed of hypocrisy, but yourself delivered and emancipated, the Lord’s free man? Oh, if so, I am sure you will grant the wisdom of the ordinance by which the Lord decreed, “This month shall be unto you the beginning of months, it shall be the first month of the year to you.” Thus much, then, on describing the event.

II. Now, secondly, I want to **MENTION THE VARIETIES OF ITS RECURRENCE** among us at this day.

The first recurrence is, of course, on *the personal salvation of each one of us*. The whole of this chapter was transacted in your heart and mine when we first knew the Lord. Our venerable Brother and Elder White, when I saw him the other night, said to me, “Oh, sir, it is very precious to read the Bible, but it is infinitely more delightful to have it here in your own heart.” Now, I find it very profitable to read about the Passover, but oh, how sweet to have a Passover transacted in your own soul by the work of the Holy Spirit! Moses wrote of something that happened thousands of years ago, but the substance of it all has happened to me in all its details, and to thousands who are trusting in the Lord. Can we not read this story in Exodus, and say, “Yes, it is even so”? Every word of it is true, for it has all occurred to me, every atom of it, even to the eating of the bitter herbs, for I recollect right well that, at the very moment when I had the sweet flavor of my Lord’s atonement in my mouth, I felt the bitterness of repentance on account of sin, and the bitterness of struggling against the temptation to sin again. Even the minute touches of that typical festival are all correct, as thousands know who have participated in its antitype. This Passover record is not a story of olden times alone, it is the

record of your life and mine—I hope it is. Thus by each separate saved man, the paschal feast is kept.

But then it happens again in a certain sense *when the man's house is saved*. Remember this was a family business. The father and mother were present when the lamb was slain. I dare say the eldest son helped to bring the lamb to the slaughter, another held the knife, a third held the basin, and the little boy fetched the bunch of hyssop, and they all united in the sacrifice. They all saw father strike the lintel and the side posts, and they all ate the lamb that night. Everyone that was in the house, all that were really part of the family, partook of the meal, they were all protected by the blood, they were all refreshed by the feast, and they all started the next morning to go to Canaan. Did you ever hold a family supper of that kind? “Oh,” some fathers might say, “it would be the beginning of family life to me if ever I might eat bread in the kingdom of God with all my sons and daughters; oh that every chick and child around my table truly belonged to Christ.” A family begins to live in the highest sense when as a family, without exception, it has all been redeemed, all sprinkled with the blood, all made to feed on Jesus, all purged from sin, and all set at liberty to go out of the domains of sin, bound for the Kingdom. Joy! Joy! Joy! “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” If any of you enjoy the privilege of family salvation, you may well set up a monument of praise, and make a generous offering to God, by whom you are thus favored. Engrave it upon marble, and set it up forever—“This household is saved and the day of its salvation is the beginning of its history in connection with the Lord's Israel.”

Extend the thought—it was not only a family ordinance but *it was for all the tribes of Israel*. There were many families, but in every house the Passover was sacrificed. Would it not be a grand thing if you that employ large numbers of men should

ever be able to gather all together and hopefully say, “I trust that all these understand the sprinkling of the blood, and all feed upon Christ”? Dear men and women that are placed in such responsible positions, you might indeed say, “This shall be the beginning of months to us.” Labor for it, therefore, and make it your heart’s desire. If you live to see a district in which you labor permeated with the gospel, what a joy! If we shall live to see London with every house sprinkled with the redeeming blood! If we should live to see all England feeding, not as many do at Christmas to excess on the delicacies of earth, but feasting spiritually, where there can be no excess, upon Christ. Oh, what a beginning of years it would be to our happy island! What a paradise it would be! If it should be so with France, if it should be so in any country, what a day to be remembered it would be. Commence a nation’s annals from its evangelization. Begin the chronicle of a people from the day when they bow at the feet of Jesus. There will come a day to this poor earth when all over it Jesus shall reign. It may be far away yet, but the day shall come when Christ shall have dominion from sea to sea. The nations which are called Christians, although they so little deserve the title, do already date their chronology from the birth of Christ, and this is a sort of faint foreshadowing of the way in which men shall one day date all things from the reign of Jesus, for His unsuffering kingdom shall yet come. God has decreed His triumph, and on all the wings of time it hastens. When He comes, that month shall be the beginning of months unto us. I say no more.

III. And now, in the last place, I come to **SHOW IN WHAT LIGHT THIS DATE IS TO BE REGARDED**, if it has occurred to us in the senses I have mentioned.

Primarily, if it has occurred in the first sense to us, personally, what about it, then? Why, first, the day in which we first knew the Savior as the Paschal Lamb should always be *the*

most honorable day that has ever dawned upon us. The Israelites placed the month Abib in the first rank because it was the month of the Passover, put down the date at which you knew the Lord as the premier day, the noblest hour you have ever known. It eclipses your natural birthday, for then you were born in sin, then you were “born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.” But now you are born into spiritual life, born unto eternal bliss. It eclipses your marriage day, for union to Christ shall bring you greater felicity than the happiest of conjugal bonds. If you have ever known a day in which you received the honors of the State, or gained distinction in learning, or attained to a position in society, or arrived at a larger wealth, all these were but dim, cloudy, foggy days compared with this “morning without clouds.” On that day your sun rose never to go down again, the die was cast; your destiny for glory was openly declared. I pray you never in your thoughts degrade that blessed day by thinking more of any pleasure, honor, or advancement than you do of the blessing of salvation by the blood of Jesus. I am afraid that some are striving and struggling after other distinctions, and if they could once reach a certain event, then they would be satisfied. Is not your salvation worth vastly more than this? They would feel that they were made for life if a certain matter turned out right. Brothers and sisters, you were made for life when you were made anew in Christ Jesus. You came to your estate when you came to Christ; you were promoted when He received you to His friendship. You gained all that you need desire when you found Christ, for a saint of old said, “He is all my salvation, and all my desire.” Do not, therefore, if the Queen should knight you or the people should send you to Parliament, think that the event would overshadow your conversion and salvation. Think of that act of grace as the Lord thinks of it, for He says, “Since you were precious in My sight you have been honorable, and I have loved you.” Unto

you that believe Jesus is honor, in Him you boast and glory, and well you may. The blood-mark is a believer's chief adornment and decoration, and his being cleansed and set free by grace is his noblest distinction. Glory in grace and in nothing else; prize the work of grace beyond all the treasures of Egypt.

This date is to be regarded as *the beginning of life*. The Israelites reckoned that all their former existence as a nation had been death. The brick kilns of Egypt, the lying among the pots, the mixing up with idolaters, the hearing of a language which they understood not—they looked on all Egyptian experience as death, and the month which ended it was to them the beginning of months. On the other hand, they looked upon all that followed after as being life. The Passover was the beginning, and only the beginning, a beginning implies something to follow it. Now then, Christian men and women, whenever you speak about your existence before conversion, always do it with shamefacedness, as one risen from the dead might speak of the morgue and the worm of corruption. I feel grieved when I hear or read of people who can stand up and talk about what they used to do before they were converted, very much in the way in which an old seafaring man talks of his voyages and storms. No, no, be ashamed of your former lusts in your ignorance, and if you must speak of them to the praise and glory of Christ, speak with bated breath and tears and sighs. Death, rottenness, corruption are all most fitly left in silence, or, if they demand a voice, let it be as solemn and mournful as a knell. Let your sin story be told in a way which shall show that you wish it had never been true. Let your conversion be the burial of the old existence, and as for that which follows after, take care that you make it real life, worthy of the grace which has quickened you.

Suppose these Israelites had loitered about in Egypt? Suppose one of them had said, “Well, I did not finish that batch

of bricks. I cannot go out just yet. I should like to see them thoroughly well baked and prepared for the pyramid”—what a foolish fellow he would have been! No, but they left the bricks, and the clay, the stuff behind, and went straight away, and let Egypt take care of itself. Now, child of God, quit the ways of sin with determination, leave the world, leave its pleasures, leave its cares, and get right away to Jesus and His leadership. You are now the Lord's free man, shall the blood be sprinkled for nothing! Shall the lamb be eaten and mean nothing! Shall the leavened bread be purged out in vain! Shall the Red Sea be crossed, and the Egyptians drowned, and you remain a slave? The thought is abhorrent. That was the mischief about the Israelites, that they had still a hankering after the leeks and garlic of Egypt. These strong smelling things had scented their garments, and it is hard to get such vile odors out of one's clothes. Alas, that Egyptian garlic clings to us, and the smell of it is not always so abominable to us as it ought to be. Besides, they pined for fish which they ate in Egypt in plenty, muddy fish though it was. There were better fish for them in Jordan, and Gennesaret, and the Great Sea, if they had gone ahead, and sweeter herbs were on Canaan's hills than ever grew in Egypt's mire. Because of this evil lusting, they were kept dodging about for 40 years in the wilderness. They might have marched into Canaan in 40 days if it had not been for that stinking garlic of theirs, and their Egyptian habits and memories. Oh, that God would cut us quite free, and enable us to forget those things of which we are now ashamed.

I have nearly concluded when I have added this, that inasmuch as the Passover was now the beginning of the year to them, *it was the putting of all things right*. I told you that the year had formerly begun in autumn, according to most traditions, was this really the best season to pitch upon? Upon second thoughts, was autumn the best season in which to begin life,

with winter all before you and everything declining? By the institution of the Passover, the year was made to begin in what is our spring. If I judge from the condition of our land I should ask—“When could the year begin more fitly than in the springtide of early May?” It seems to me that it actually does begin in the spring. I do not see that the year naturally begins today, though it does so arbitrarily. We are in about the middle of winter, and the year as yet lies dead. When the birds sing and the flowers rise from their beds of earth, then the year begins. It seems to me a strange supposition that our first parents commenced life in autumn, amid lengthening nights and declining forces. No, we say, by all means, let the date be fixed in spring, so that the salutations of the new year shall be sweet with fragrant flowers and rich with joyous songs. Nor would the time of our spring in the East be a season without supplies, for in April and May the first ears of corn are ready, and many other fruits are fit for food. It was good for the Israelites to have the feast of the first fruits in the month of Abib, to bring the first ears to the Lord, and not to wait till they were ripe before they blessed the Giver of all good. We ought to be grateful for green mercies, and not tarry till everything comes to ripeness. In some parts of the East there is fruit all the year round and why not in Eden? In the delightful country where I have sojourned, which bears a very close resemblance to the East, there are fruits still ripening upon the trees, and one tree or another will be found to bear fruit every month all the year round, so that if Adam had been created in the month of April there would have been food for him, followed by a succession of fruits which would have supplied all his needs. Then he would have had summer before him with all its ripening beauties, and this is a more paradisiacal outlook than winter. It is right that the year should begin with the first fruits, and I am sure it is quite right that the year should begin with you and

with me when we come to Christ and receive the first fruits of the Spirit. Everything is out of joint till a man knows Christ, everything is disorderly and bottom upwards till the gospel comes and turns him upside down, and then the right side is up again. Man is all wrong till the gospel puts him all right. Though grace is above nature, it is not contrary to nature, but restores true nature. Our nature is never so truly the nature of a man as when it is no longer man's sinful nature. We become truly men, such as God meant men to be, when we cease to be men such as sin has made men to be.

Our life, beginning as it does at our spiritual Passover, and at our feeding upon Christ, we ought always to regard our conversion as a festival and remember it with praise. Whenever we look back upon it, the memory of it should excite delight in our hearts. I wonder how long a man ought to thank God for forgiving his sins? Is life long enough? Is time long enough? Is eternity too long? How long ought a man to thank God for saving him from going down to hell? Would 50 years suffice? Oh no, that would never do, the blessing is too great to be all sung of in a millennium. Suppose you and I never had a single mercy except this one, that we were made the children of God and co-heirs with Christ Jesus—suppose we had nothing else to enjoy! We ought to sing about that alone forever and ever. Yes, if we were sick, cast on the bed of pain with a hundred diseases, with our bones sticking through our skin, yet since God's everlasting mercy will sanctify every pain and every affliction, should we not still continue to lift up happy psalms to God and praise Him forever and ever? Therefore, let that be your watchword all through the year—"Hallelujah, praise the Lord!" The Israelite always closed the Passover with a hymn of praise, therefore let us close our sermon this morning with holy joy, and continue our happy music till this year ends, yes, till time shall be no more. Amen.

1638 MEN WITHOUT HEART – DEUT. 29:4

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, January 8th, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“Yet the Lord has not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see and ears to hear, unto this day.” — Deuteronomy 29:4

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Deuteronomy 29]

FEELING, SIGHT, HEARING! What wonderful things these are. If we could exist without them what a wretched condition ours would be. The outer world would be unknown to us if the gates of the senses were shut, and the soul would be famished, like Samaria when it was shut up, and there was no going in nor coming out. Take away from us the power of perception by touch, smell, taste, sight, and hearing, and it would be of small account to us that the world was beautiful, for to our consciousness there would scarcely be a world at all. All the colors of the rainbow, the warmth of the sun, the freshness of the breeze, the sweetness of honey, the charms of music, and even the terrors of storms would cease, the soul would be shut up within the body as within a prison which had neither doors nor windows. The dreariest dungeon of the Bastille would be liberty compared with such a state. Perhaps the mind might exist, but certainly it could not live. It would be a misuse of language to call it life. When any one of the senses is gone it

involves great deprivation, and subjects the person enduring it to the pity of his fellows. But if *all* were absent what wretchedness must ensue. Loss of sight or hearing creates among us a large number of sufferers who deserve our sympathy, but what mourning would suffice for those, if there were indeed any such, who physically had neither heart to perceive, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear!

Transfer your thoughts now from these external senses by which we become conscious of the external world to those spiritual senses by which we perceive the spiritual world, the kingdom of heaven, the Lord of that kingdom, and all the powers of the world to come. There is a heart which should be tender, by which we perceive the presence of God and feel His operations, and even behold the Lord Himself, as it is written, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” There is a spiritual eye by which the things invisible are discerned, blessed are they to whom the Lord has given to see the things of His kingdom, which to the unrenewed remain hidden in parables. There is a spiritual ear by which we hear the gentle whispers of the Spirit, which frequently come to us internally, without the medium of sounds that can affect the ears. Blessed are those who have the ear which the Lord has purged, and cleansed, and opened, so that it listens to the divine call. But there is no blessedness in the case of men devoid of spiritual feeling, sight, and hearing. Theirs is a miserable plight. Just what the blind man, and the deaf man, and the man who is destitute of feeling would be in the outer world, which is what many men are as to the spiritual world. Alas, there are among us in this congregation this day, and all around us in myriads, poor souls of whom this text is true, “The Lord has not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, to this day.”

This is a very, very mournful case. But perhaps the most lamentable aspect of it is that the persons who are thus devoid of the spiritual senses, by which they can converse with the best and highest world, are not conscious of their incapacity, or, if partially conscious of it, seem to be stupidly contented to remain as they are. The naturally blind man would see if he could. What shall I say of those whose inability to see spiritually is willful, and lies more in their will than anywhere else? The man who cannot hear the voice of his fellow would greatly rejoice if the gates of sound once opened to him. But there are none as deaf as those who will not hear, whose deafness is moral, whose inability to hear the voice of God lies in this fact, that they deliberately close their ears to the voice of holy exhortation. They are ready enough to listen to the siren songs of temptation, and they bend a willing ear to the subtle deceit of the serpent, but they will not regard the tender, loving wisdom of the good Shepherd. They are quick of hearing to evil, but deaf to good. This is the sad part of it, they are blind, and do not want to see, they are deaf, and do not wish to hear. Our poet says—

“How helpless guilty nature lies,
Unconscious of its load.”

In this unconsciousness lies the heart of the mischief. Helpless man is unconscious of his own helplessness. Because they say, “We see,” therefore their sin remains. If they were blind and knew it, it was another matter, and signs of hope would be visible. But to be blind and yet to boast of having superior sight, and to ridicule those who see, is the lamentable condition of not a few. They will not thank us for our pity, but much they need it. Eyes have they, but they see not, and yet they glory in their farsightedness. Multitudes around us are in

this plight. When the prophet says, “Bring forth the blind people that have eyes,” we can only wonder where we should put them all if they were willing to assemble in one place. My own spirit feels very heavy in having to preach upon this subject this morning, but I would do so with great tenderness of heart, lamenting while I blame. It seems to me that Moses felt very tenderly to the people whom he here addresses, he puts his meaning in the gentlest conceivable shape when he says, “The Lord has not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, to this day.” He does not excuse, but yet he softly chides. He speaks not with the stern severity of Isaiah when he cried in the name of the Lord, “Go and tell this people, Hear you indeed, but understand not; and see you indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.”

What a sad thing it is that so many are rich in all things except the one thing necessary. God has given them abundance of earthly possessions, but He has not given them eyes to see His bounty, nor ears to hear His voice of love, nor a heart to perceive His presence in the mercies which they enjoy. Such see the harvest, but not the Great Farmer. They enjoy the fruitful seasons, but take no delight in the giver of the rain and the sender of the sunshine. What a sad condition to be in! Alas, poor rich man! He has so much and yet so little! And what a lamentable sight is the educated man of this world who is learned in all the lore of the ancients, and versed in all the science of the moderns, who has pried into the secret chambers of knowledge, and has observed the skill of the Eternal in the starry heavens and in microscopic life, and yet with all his attainments has no knowledge of his Maker, and will not accept the evidence of His presence. How sad that we should have to

say to such, “Yes, you know all the facts, and yet cannot see beneath their surface. You allow prejudice to blind your eyes to the plain teaching of creation and Providence. You walk through the studio and admire the pictures, and deny the artist’s existence, whereas if you were candid you would believe in him from his works, and then go on to spell out his character from them. Alas, you have not a heart to perceive, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear to this day.” Well spoke the apostle when he said, “Not many great men after the flesh, not many learned are called.” Often those that know the most of the secular know the least of the sacred. Eyes that seem as if they could pierce through rocks, and read the mysteries of primeval night, turn out to be mere sightless eyeballs as to divine things. Yet they know it not, neither do they guess at their folly. How sad it is that there should be so many who are quick in reasoning, and ready in invention, which cannot see that the visible argues an invisible Creator, and that providential arrangements prove that a Great Father is over all. As Herbert says, they, “walk with their staff to heaven,” they thread the stars like beads upon a string, harness the lightning, and weigh the starry orbs, and yet they have not discovered their God, who is above, around, without, and within them. They are open-eyed to all things but unto Him who fills all in all. I fear I must apply to them the language of Paul, “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.”

This morning I shall speak as I shall be helped by the Holy Spirit, first upon *a very mournful fact*. Secondly, upon *a yet more mournful reason* for that fact, and thirdly, upon *a mournful result*, which comes out of that fact. May what is said be taken as a word of warning, and may God the Holy Spirit bless it to the conversion of everyone here present who remains as yet

unrenewed. I say everyone, for there is not one among you whom I would knowingly exempt from my prayers.

I. First, we shall think upon **A MOURNFUL FACT**. Here was a whole nation, with but very few exceptions, of whom their leader, who knew them best and loved them best, was obliged to say, “The Lord has not given you a heart to perceive to this day.” The mournful part of it was that this was *the nation that had been specially favored of God above all others*. God had not entered into covenant with Edom or with Moab. He had not sent the light of His truth to Egypt, or to Ethiopia, or to any other of the nations of antiquity. But this comparatively little and insignificant people had been selected that to it might be committed the oracles of God. They were the one candlestick of the human race. They had light in their dwellings, while all around them, brooded a darkness which might be felt. By His name, Jehovah the Lord was made known to them when He spoke to Moses in the desert, and manifested Himself to him in the burning bush. “He made known His ways to Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel.” He gave to this people revelation after revelation, containing guidance, rule, comfort and instruction even as it is written, “He has not dealt so with any people.” Almost all the light then given was focused upon Israel, and yet they had not eyes to see. “God speaks once, yes, twice, yet man perceives it not for need of ears which can hear.” Is not this a dreadful thing? I can understand the other nations being blind and senseless, for they were in the dark, and “the times of their ignorance God winked at,” but for this nation, upon whom the sun of righteousness had risen, to choose darkness and abhor the light is a horrible thing. By the preciousness of the privilege, the sin of its rejection was greatly enhanced. This is sad, sad to the utmost degree of sadness, but is it not the case with some of you? Are there not among you those who have the clearest light, and yet choose the ways of

darkness? My dear hearers, be honest with yourselves and answer. Born of godly parents, singled out to be carefully instructed in the things of God, attending a faithful ministry from your youth up, reading your Bible and being thoroughly versed in its contents, and yet, for all that, without godly feeling and gracious perception. I grieve that you should have such privileges and yet remain strangers to salvation. Will it be so forever? Shall it always be said of you, “The Lord has not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, to this day”?

Note again, that not only were they a highly favored people, but *they had seen very wonderful acts performed by the Lord Himself*. Moses says, “You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land, the great temptations which your eyes have seen, the signs and those great miracles.” Does it not seem deplorable that they could see God lifting His hand against Pharaoh with plague after plague, and yet not acknowledge Him to be the only living and true God? Those plagues smote the gods of Egypt, how could Israel ever turn aside to worship such dishonored deities? Each plague was aimed against some sacred object of Egyptian worship, and the marvel is that these defeated idols should still be revered by Israel. Truly the Lord spoke with a loud voice from heaven, with a voice which even Pharaoh was compelled to hear, and yet His own people heard Him not. They saw the plagues, and did not discern the glory of their God so as to remain faithful to Him. And that Red Sea! Was not that a marvel enough? How often have I wished that I could have been there to see the eager waters leap on Pharaoh and all his hosts! What joy to have heard the sound of the timbrel, and to have seen the twinkling feet of the maidens as they danced and chanted, “Sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider

He has cast into the sea.” Could men stand there and see that, and yet not perceive that the gods of the heathen are idols, and that only Jehovah is the living and true God, and could they shake off the fear and dread of this mighty God from their souls, and turn to worship a golden calf which their own hands had made? Yes, such is the deplorable wickedness of man that if God were to work over again, all the miracles of Egypt in the sight of those of you who are unbelievers, you would not be converted to His fear. You would be staggered by the wonder, but you would not be converted by the witness. Something else is needed over and above all miracles before the blinded eye will care to see, or the hardened heart will begin to feel. You also have witnessed great deeds of grace in our midst, and yet you are not convinced. You even believe in all the miracles of Scripture, and in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus, and yet you do not trust Him. Ah me, what can I say? What can I do but mourn over you?

In addition to this, *these people had passed through a very remarkable experience.* They had been brought out of Egypt by miracle, and by the same power they had passed through the depths of the sea as on dry land. Moses thus describes their wilderness history, “And I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and your shoe is not waxen old upon your foot. You have not eaten bread, neither have you drunk wine or strong drink: that you might know that I am the Lord your God.” All these forty years they lived by miracles, and yet they neither feared, nor loved, nor trusted Jehovah their God who worked all these signs among them. As a nation they did not receive the spiritual teaching which the Lord set before them. Do you blame them? Look at your home. Are they the only people who have thus offended? May I not be addressing some today whose experience has been singularly full of mercy and love? God has

been strangely gracious to you, my friend. He has led you by a way that you knew not, and if you could but see it, His hand has been conspicuously with you from the time when you left your father's house unto this day. I know not to whom I may be speaking, but I am persuaded that there are some here whose career has been especially marked by the providence of God. Yours has been no common journey of life. You have been preserved in accident and restored from sickness. The stars in their courses have seemed to fight for you, and the stones of the field have joined to defend you, and yet you do not observe the hand of the Lord in all this. The Lord has girded you though you have not known Him, He has guided you, restrained you, delivered you, instructed you even though you have not deigned to think of Him. Yes, He has saved you from the consequences of your own folly, or you would before long have been a beggar, or a mass of sores, or a prisoner in the last dreaded dungeon. He has interposed to save you from your own folly, and here you are where mercy pleads, and grace holds out her silver scepter. Alas, even to this day you have not a heart to perceive the long-suffering of God, nor eyes to see your obligations, nor ears to hear the wooing of His love, but you are still going on in rebellion against God. Shall it always be so? It is grievous that it has been thus so long. Is there no turning? Is there no relenting? Must you die in your sins?

In addition to all this sight and experience, the Israelites *had received remarkable instruction*. In the wilderness, the Lord taught them by Moses and Aaron. The tabernacle was pitched in their midst, according to the pattern which Moses had seen on the mountain, and there a worship was instituted, every part of which was singularly rich in instruction, as we all know to this day. There was not a lamb slaughtered, nor a lamp kindled, nor a handful of incense burned on the altar, nor a curtain folded up, nor was a silver socket set in its place, without some

moral and spiritual significance. Had they desired to learn it, they might have discovered in the tabernacle in the wilderness great stores of teachings as to those things which make for the peace and salvation of men, but they had no heart to perceive, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear, and so the whole apparatus of teaching was lost upon them. Ah, dear hearers, you may enjoy the most clear instruction, you may have line upon line, precept upon precept, you may read God's Book itself, and you may observe the experience of Christians, and you may have all their love and affection to help you to understand the things of God, and yet for all that you may remain without spiritual perception. All the external processes of holy teaching may spend themselves in vain upon you for 40, 50, 60, or even 70 years, and you may still remain blind and unfeeling. You may know the letter of doctrine, and yet never perceive its meaning. You may see the logical nature and certainty of a sacred truth and yet never see its bearings upon yourself. Does your present condition prove this assertion? Are you also without understanding? Are you still untaught in the things of God? O that the Holy Spirit may now create in you a new heart, and bestow both spiritual eyes and ears upon you.

One thing else is worth notice. These people *had been associated with remarkable characters*. They were not all blinded, there were a few among them who were gracious, and so were made to perceive. Caleb and Joshua were there, and Aaron and Miriam, but chiefly there was Moses, grandest of men, true father of the nation. It was something to have lived in a camp where you could speak with such a man as Moses, who had seen God, face to face, so that upon his brow there rested the glow of Deity when he came down from the mountain. You, too, my friends, have met with those whose conversation has been in heaven, and whose lives are bright with communion with the Lord. If we do not see and will not see where another

sees so clearly, we stand condemned. A man who considers himself highly intelligent stands with me upon the hill, and looks out upon a fair landscape, over which hangs a wonderful sky bedecked with fleecy clouds, while at our feet blooms a wealth of lovely flowers. He tells me that in all this he sees no evidence of God. Is he not blind? As for me, I feel myself surrounded by the all-embracing Deity, and His presence is the greatest fact of my consciousness—

“God has a presence and that you may see
In the fold of the flower, the leaf of the tree;
In the sun of the noon, the star of the night;
In the storm cloud of darkness, the rainbow of light;
In the waves of the ocean, the furrows of land;
In the mountains of granite, the atom of sand!
Turn where you may, from the sky to the sod,
Where can you gaze that you see not God?”

Now, either I am a liar or my neighbor is sadly dull of perception, and as I know that I speak the truth, I know also that he is blind. If Moses saw, he by that fact left the rest of the people without excuse. That they would not perceive was exceedingly provoking to the Lord, for among them God was manifest in the most remarkable manner. The Lord came from Sinai and the Holy One from Paran. From the top of the smoking mountain He spoke with voice of trumpet and with sound of thunder, the earth shook and trembled beneath His feet. The Lord was among them conspicuously in the flaming pillar by night and in the shadowing cloud by day. Israel saw the glory of her God, she could not help seeing it, and yet the people refused to behold Him, and asked, “Is the Lord among us or not?” Moses said of them, “They are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them. O that they

were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!” Even to the very end of 40 years of patient instruction they remained without the true knowledge of God.

Ah me! This is sad, most sad, but I fear that in this congregation we have a number who are like they are. Years have not brought them grace, nor has a lifetime yielded them wisdom. They have seen God’s wonders of grace upon their friends and relatives, they have also tasted of the Lord’s goodness in their own lives, and they have heard His voice in the preaching of the gospel, for Jesus Christ has been set forth plainly crucified among them, and yet they have not seen the Lord, and do not hear Him even to this day. This is no new thing, but it is none the less a grief of heart to those of us who fear the Lord and feel a love for souls. Brethren, remember that these Jews in subsequent generations had great prophets among them, and what was the success of their labor? Did they not cry, “Who has believed our report?” At length they saw the Son of God among them, and how did *He* fare? Jesus Himself, with all His miracles of grace and words of love, came unto His own people and they received Him not, but cried, “Crucify Him, crucify Him.”

How true it is that nothing can bless men till almighty grace renews them. If one should rise from the dead, men would not repent unless they were renewed. There is no miracle that God can do, there is no marvel that omnipotence itself can perform, which can make men see, who have no spiritual eyes. Nothing can make men feel, so long as their hearts remain hardened against the Most High. “The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” Verily it is written with truth, “You must be born again.” The unbelief of man, so long as it remains, renders blessing impossible. The gospels represent our Lord Himself

as baffled by man's refusal to believe, as it is written, "He could not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief." Oh the wretchedness of this state of things, who shall deliver men from it? Who can attempt the task but God only?

II. We will now hasten to spend a few minutes in descending into a still lower depth. Let us note **THE MOURNFUL REASONS FOR ALL THIS.** The reasons, for their incapacity to see and perceive, lay first, in *the fact that these people never believed in their own blindness.* They had no heart to perceive, and they did not perceive their absence of perception, they had no eyes with which to detect their own dimness of vision. They were such fools as to dote on their own wisdom, so poor as to think themselves rich, so hypocritical as to profess to be sincere. They thought they knew better than their God, and so they sat in judgment upon His providence and styled the provision of His wisdom "light bread." They were so quick of perception that when Moses was gone away for a little while they said, "Make us gods, which shall go before us; as for this Moses, we know not what has become of him." They showed their pretended wisdom by suspecting both the Lord and His servant Moses as soon as they fell into any difficulty. "Because there were no graves in Egypt, therefore has He brought us forth that we may die in the wilderness?" They would gladly snatch from Jehovah's hand the rod of government, and become leaders for themselves. Jeshurun forsook God that made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of His salvation. They were wise in their own conceits, and therefore it was that they could not see. Pride is the great creator of darkness, like Nahash the Ammonite it puts out the right eye. Men seek not the light, because they boast that they are the children of the day and need no light from above.

More than this, *these men never asked for a heart to perceive, eyes to see, and ears to hear.* No man has ever asked for these things

and been refused, no soul has cried in its blindness and darkness, “Open my eyes,” but what a gracious answer has always come. It is the prerogative of the Lord Jesus to open the blind eyes, but this He is always ready to do whenever men call upon His name. Let but the poor man cry and the Lord Jesus must and will hear him, and pour the daylight into his soul. In Israel’s case there was a distinct refusal to be blest, “But My people would not hearken to My voice; and Israel would have none of Me.” There was no prayer for the heavenly blessing, but an aversion to it. “You have not, because you ask not.” “They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness.” Rightly those are left in darkness who will not ask God to give them light, or to open their eyes. Is not this the case with some of you? O my hearers, I must be plain and personal with you—is it not true that some of you are prayerless, Christless, graceless? What will become of you? Your case is all the more to be lamented because you are without excuse.

Then, moreover, *what little light they did have, they resisted.* When they were forced to see, it was only for a moment that they would be instructed, and then they shut their eyes, again. “When He slew them, then they sought Him: and they returned and inquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their rock and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter Him with their mouth, and they lied to Him with their tongues.” When He sent fiery serpents among them, or otherwise smote them, then they perceived His presence for a while, but soon they turned back and dealt deceitfully. They took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of their god Remphan, and worshipped engraved images in secret in their tents, so that they provoked the Lord to jealousy, and He was incensed against them. They loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. They did not actually cry like

Pharaoh, “Who is Jehovah that I should obey His voice?” but in their hearts they meant it. They lusted after the abominable rites of Baal-peor, and fell into filthiness in the days of Balaam, although God Himself dwelt among them in all His matchless purity and holiness. Now, this is the gravest crime of all—to leave the holy God for impure idolatries.

Oh sinners that love not God, is it not because you love that which is evil? Oh, you that never sees Him or seeks after Him, is not the cause of your blindness to be found in your love of sin? “He that does evil hates the light.” This willfulness of yours, this desperate bent of your hearts towards evil, how will you answer for it? Our fear for you is great, we are afraid that you will perish through your hardness of heart. Oh that you had a desire towards God! Oh that you willed to turn to Jesus. Oh that His grace would cure you of your stiff-necked rebellions! Jesus stands here this morning and He cries, “How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not.” He waits to be gracious. Do you doubt this? He has given you all manner of good things. Do you think He would have refused you eyes to see, and a heart to feel, if these had been sought? “He gives liberally and upbraids not.” If we, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will our heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?

But no, men choose their own delusions, they abide in their darling sins, they perish by suicide. Like Saul, every unbeliever falls upon his own sword. “Israel, you have destroyed yourself.” Yet you delight in your destruction, and you enter into league with that which devours you. You are a prisoner, but you hug your chains! You see not, for you willfully blow out the candle. You hear not, for you cover your own ears, you are spiritually dead, but you have chosen corruption. By prejudice, and pride, and hardness of heart you have shut out yourself from love. Ah

me; that such folly as this should be continued in by any whom frequent this house of prayer. Can it be possible that you are so foolish? Blessed be the Lord, many of you have eyes to see and ears to hear. Let all such adore the sovereign grace which has given these gifts to them. Let them worship the love which has sweetly conquered their stubborn will, leading their captivity captive, and giving them to feel and know and taste of spiritual things. Not to you be the glory, but to the Lord alone. To those who know not the Lord, there is shame and confusion, but to those who have known Him there is no self-glorification, for, as the wise man says, “The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord has made even both of them.” To be blind of heart is our sin, but to be made to see is the gift of grace. Our misery is our own work, but our salvation is of the Lord.

III. I conclude by noticing what was **THE MOURNFUL RESULT** of these people being so highly favored and privileged, and yet not seeing nor discerning their God. The result was, first, *that they missed a happy portion*. I can hardly imagine how happy the children of Israel might have been. They left Egypt with a high hand and an outstretched arm, their ears were hung with jewels, and their purses were filled with riches, while around them manna dropped from heaven, and cool streams flowed at their side. They might have made a quick march to the promised land, and at once entered their rest, for their God who had sent the hornet before them would soon have driven out their adversaries. “How should one have chased a thousand and two put ten thousand to flight.” In the land of promise they would have dwelt securely, and God would have given them rest. Then would the heavens have heard the earth, and the earth would have yielded such harvests that one year in seven they would have had no need either to sow or reap, but would have spent their whole time in praising God. And then a jubilee would have come every seventh seven, in which with

high-sounding cymbals they would magnify the Most High. They would have known no invading enemy, and felt neither blast, nor blight, nor mildew, in fact, they would have been the happiest nation under heaven, “He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied you.” They flung all this on one side, they would not have God, and so they could not have prosperity. They walked contrary to Him, and He walked contrary to them. They would not obey Him, and therefore His anger smoked against them.

Think, moreover, what a glorious destiny they threw aside. Had they been equal to the occasion, by God’s grace they might have been a nation of kings and priests, they might have been the Lord’s missionaries to all lands, the light-bearers to all peoples. Every arrangement was made to enable them to live a godly, holy, joyous, sanctified life. They ate angels’ food, and they might have lived angels’ lives, acting as heralds, to tell to others what wonders God had worked for them. Alas, they could not see the moral grandeur of so high a calling, and they thought more of eating flesh than of honoring the Lord and teaching His law. I would like to say to some of you that God has been setting before you an open door, and yet you have not perceived Him, nor loved Him. He would make saints of you and you are content to be money-grubbers. You have judged yourselves unworthy of the prize which He has set before you. You do not know what a happy lot you have declined.

Just lately you were a young man—you are getting to middle life now—and you do not know what golden opportunities you have wasted. As Cleopatra melted pearls and swallowed them as a drink, so have you drunk down the possibilities of glory as if they were common things. What might not God have done with some of you, if your hearts had been given to Him years ago? By this time you might have

achieved a lifework, glorious to God, honorable to yourself, and happy to your friends. The stuff is in you, which might have been molded into a minister, a missionary, a soul-winner, and you might have been among the happiest and best of men. Nor does the waste end with yourself; you are causing damage to many others. Your children are growing up to follow your follies, wasting their lives as you have squandered yours! Oh, had you yielded to Jesus years ago your sons might have been your honor and comfort, and your daughters your joy and delight. You have flung away such opportunities as could not be bought for gold. Thus says the Lord, “Oh that My people had hearkened unto Me, and Israel had walked in My ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned My hand against their adversaries. The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves unto Him: but their time should have endured forever.” Happy are God’s people, but wretched are they who being placed where they could see God’s hand yet will not see it, where they could hear God’s voice yet will not hear it, but refuse the kingdom of heaven which has come so near unto them.

Another result was that while they missed so high a position, *they went on sinning*. As they did not learn the lesson God was teaching them, namely, that He was God, and that to serve Him was their joy and their prosperity, they went from one evil to another, provoking the Lord to jealousy. From grumbling and murmuring they went on to rebelling. “Let us make a captain,” they said, “and let us return to Egypt.” From being idolatrous they became lascivious, and fell into the sin of uncleanness with the women of Moab. Often they were actual idolaters, and always they were unstable of heart. So they went from one sin to another because they had not a heart to perceive, nor ears to hear their God.

Therefore *they frequently suffered*. A plague broke out one time, and a fire at another. At one time they were visited with fever, and soon the earth opened beneath them. One day the Amalekites smote them, another day fiery serpents leaped up from the sand, and they died by the thousands, being poisoned by their bites. They suffered much and often, and in all their trials they did but reap what they had sown. A man does not know what he is doing when he sins. We tell our naughty children that we have rods in pickle for them, and this is assuredly the case with the great Father, who has chastisement laid up for the people who willfully revolt from Him. He brings forth sorrow and wrath for those who harden their hearts and continue in their iniquities. Ah, my hearers, how many of you are this day reaping what your own hands have sown.

At last *this evil ended terribly*. The Lord lifted His hand to heaven, and swore that the rebellious generation should not enter into His rest, and they began to die by wholesale till Moses cried, “We are consumed by Your anger, and by Your wrath are we troubled.” Not one of the men that came out of Egypt, save only Joshua and Caleb, reached the promised land. Whenever they pitched their tents at eventide, the first thing was to celebrate the funerals of the day. The tribes marched on, and on the march they stumbled into their graves, till the whole of that peninsula in which they had to wander up and down for 40 years became one vast cemetery, where the thousands of Israel were all buried. Who slew all these? Neither by the sword of the enemy nor by the arrow of the foe were they destroyed, but sin laid them in heaps as in the day of battle.

They could not enter in because of their unbelief. The land that flowed with milk and honey lay smiling in the calm sunlight, on the other side of Jordan, but they could not enter in because they had no heart to perceive, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear the Lord and His word. And this is the main misery of your

condition, O you careless ones, that you will not be able to enter into God's rest either here or hereafter. This is the misery of it to me, that I must set Christ before some of you and you will never have Him, that I must extol His atoning blood, but you will refuse to be washed in it, that I must go on declaring my Lord's message as long as this tongue can move, and bidding you believe in Jesus Christ and find eternal life, but still, of some of you I shall always have to say, "The Lord has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this day."

Alas, your eyes will be opened one day, in another sense. "The rich man saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom." Who was that? That was a Jew of the kind I have described, who had everything in this life, being clothed in purple, and faring sumptuously every day, but he had no heart to perceive or eyes to see. "In hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments." Oh, my hearers, hell's torments will open your eyes. Will you wait till then? O you ungodly ones, you will think then. I pray God you may have sense enough to think now, while thinking will be of use to you. If there is a heaven, seek it, if there is a hell, escape it, if there is a God, love Him, if there is a Christ, trust Him, if there is sin, seek to be washed from it, if there is pardon, rest not till you have it. Oh do not mock your Savior! Do not make a game of eternal realities! Be in earnest about this and in earnest at once.

If you must play the fool, trifle with something less precious than your souls. Procure toys less expensive than your own immortal destinies. Oh, that God would bless this word to you careless ones, that you may feel at once that you do not feel as you should, and begin to cry to God to give you feeling, that you may see that you do not see, and begin to cry, "Lord, open my eyes," that you may hear this morning a voice which shall make you feel that you do not hear as you ought to hear,

and therefore cry to God to give you hearing. Remember that spiritual life is only from God. It is His gift, and it is not bestowed according to merit, but is given by pure grace to the unworthy. Seek it, and you shall have it, for so it is written, “He that asks receives, he that seeks finds, and to him that knocks it shall be opened.” Will your ears again refuse the language of His grace? Will you still go to your farm and to your merchandise, to your labor and to your amusement, and reject the voice that calls you to glory and immortality? Will you trample upon the bleeding love of Jesus? Oh, then, what shall I do, and to whom shall I turn? I must go back to my Master, mourning with Isaiah, “Who has believed our report, and to who is the arm of the Lord revealed?” Lord, reveal Your arm, and then they will believe the report. Amen and Amen.

1639 ACCEPTABLE SERVICE – HEB. 12:28-29

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, January 15, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire. — Hebrews 12:28-29

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Hebrews 12]

AS A CONGREGATION you have of late been diligently engaged in the service of God by endeavoring to provide a home for fatherless children. I have been astonished and delighted at the liberality which has been shown by all sorts of persons in this good and gracious work. I felt sometimes like the king of old, who said, “Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort?” I am sure you have well earned all the commendation that your fellow Christians can give to you, for the work has been so well and so heartily done that we all rejoice together. But, now that it is all over, careful thoughts arise in my mind. It is but a small thing that you and I should be accepted of one another. The great matter is that we should be accepted of the Lord. I, who am but as the doorkeeper of my Master’s house, not only approve, but abundantly commend my fellow servants, but what of that? The great point is that the King Himself should

say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” We do but see the fair externals of things, but the great Father of spirits searches the hearts and tries the reins of the children of men, and judges after a higher standard. Therefore, with holy anxiety have I looked at this text and turned it over, hoping that the Holy Spirit may cause each one who has engaged in our benevolent work to examine himself, and to judge his part in this labor of love, that he may amend any fault which may hinder his work from being a sacrifice of sweet savor unto the Most High. What if we should bring our sacrifice and the Lord should have no respect to it! That would be a repetition of the sad story of Cain, of whom it is written, “Unto Cain and to his offering the Lord had not respect.” Then, indeed, would our countenances be fallen, but I trust it would be with repentance rather than rebellion. If unaccepted of the Lord, we would weep bitterly, and ask Him that the sin-offering which lies at the door might be available for us. The chief thing is that our labor should be acceptable unto God, and upon that subject I shall speak this morning, as the Spirit of God shall enable me.

Many things are absolutely necessary for the acceptance of any service rendered unto God, of these some are not stated in the text, but they are so important that I commence with mentioning them. The first is that the person who attempts to serve God should himself be accepted. The offerer must himself be accepted in the Beloved, or his offering will be tainted by his condition and be inevitably unacceptable. The uncleanness of the person pollutes his sacrifice. He that has an impenitent heart, an unrenewed will, a disobedient mind, an unholy life, may perform outward acts of devotion, but the Lord says, to such—“Who has required this at your hand, to tread My courts? Bring no more vain oblations unto Me.” The heart itself must be given to God, for the offering which comes from a heartless worshipper is a mere pretense of homage to

the Most High. See well to that, my dear hearers. God says, “My son, give Me your heart.” Give whatever you please afterwards, but the heart must lead the way—that is essential. Let a traitor in actual rebellion bring tribute to a king, it will be but a mockery. He must first submit himself unto his prince, and then he may come with his token of loyalty.

The next essential is that, the act being performed by a person accepted, it should be distinctly done as unto God. Our text speaks of serving *God*. Alas, much is done which is in itself externally commendable, but it is not acceptable to God, because it is not rendered unto Him, and with a view to His glory. Some, like the Pharisees of old, give alms out of ostentation; they sound a trumpet before them that they may have praise of men. Verily, I say unto you, they have their reward, and a poor reward it is. Some are energetic in holy work out of emulation, that they may surpass others, and may have credit for superior ability and goodness. Like Jehu they cry, “Come see my zeal for the Lord of Hosts!” Now, inasmuch as in this they seek their own honor, and not the glory of God, they cannot be accepted of Him. Better far, the two mites dropped into the treasury unobserved of all but the great Master Himself, than all the wealth that we could possibly bring if we made the offering with divided intent. If we would serve God, we must forget self. There must be the distinct desire to obey and honor the Lord, and we must not act as men-pleasers, or as laboring for our own exaltation, otherwise the Lord will abhor our offering.

And we must take care that all this is done with faith in Christ Jesus, for it is a law of universal observation in the kingdom of heaven that “without faith it is impossible to please God.” “Though I give my body to be burned and have not charity,” says Paul, “it profits me nothing,” and the same may be said concerning faith. He who does not believe in God, and

yet pretends to be religious, is manifestly either a deceiver or deceived. As the unbeliever is condemned already, his service can only be that of a condemned man, and how can it give pleasure to the Lord? We must bring our offering to Jesus, our great High Priest, and He must present it for us, for it can only be acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

These things being mentioned, I now confine myself to the text itself, which has in it a world of solemn, heart-searching thought with regard to the acceptable service of God.

I. And first, according to the apostle, if we are to serve God acceptably it must be **UNDER A SENSE OF OUR IMMEASURABLE OBLIGATION TO HIM**. Look, “Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” See, brethren, whatever service we may render to God, we must begin by being receivers. Our first dealing with the Most High must not be our bringing anything to Him, but our accepting of everything from Him. We receive, that is our first stage, and I believe it is our last, for if we are ever able to serve the Lord by our gifts, we shall have to confess, “Of Your own have we given to You.” When we are privileged to cast our crowns before Emanuel’s throne, they will be crowns which He Himself bestowed upon us of His own sovereign grace. Every hymn that comes up from saints made perfect is but an echo of almighty love. They love Him because He first loved them. They are first receivers, and then, like pipes that are well-filled from the fountainhead, they pour out their contents. First we receive grace, and then we return service, holy service is a gift from beginning to end.

We must, then, in approaching God, remember what we have received from Him, and is it not wonderful that it should be written, “We receiving a kingdom”? What a gift to receive! This is a divine gift, we have received not a pauper’s pension,

but a kingdom—"a kingdom which cannot be moved." The old dispensation or kingdom has passed away, its ceremonial laws are done away with and its very spirit is superseded by a higher spirit, and we have entered upon another kingdom, in which the ruling principle is not law, but love. We are not under the yoke of Moses, but we are the subjects of King Jesus, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light. The kingdom of Jesus will never end while time shall last, for He is the King Eternal, and immortal; neither will His laws be changed, nor shall His subjects die. Till that day when He shall deliver up the kingdom unto God, even the Father, and God shall be all in all, Jesus must reign. And even when the earthly mediatorial reign is consummated, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven shall be continued unto us, and we shall still be members and citizens of it. We have received an eternal kingdom, and for this we ought to be eternally grateful. The shadows have vanished, but the substance abides, we have risen out of the types of Judaism into His kingdom by which grace and truth have come unto us. This gospel state abides, above the wreck of all things it remains, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Ours is the kingdom of Jesus Christ, in which the gospel is the law, believers are the privileged subjects, and grace and glory are the revenue—a kingdom daily growing in brightness, a kingdom which shall consummate its glory in the eternal world when Christ shall have put all enemies under His feet, and His people shall reign with Him forever and ever.

"But," you say, "we have not *received* this kingdom yet." I answer that we have received it in a certain sense. We have received it first in the *promise*. Our Lord said, "I appoint unto you a kingdom as My Father has appointed unto Me." "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Now, with a man's word, if he is a man of honor, we are content. We count his promissory note as the equivalent

of the gold which he promises to pay. Let him set his hand to a promise and we pass it from hand to hand, regarding it as the thing, itself, which it promises. Shall we not think as much of the Word of God? The promise of God is so firm, so sure, so true, that inasmuch as He has promised a kingdom unto all them that wait for the appearing of His Son, that kingdom is ours, and by faith we grasp it this morning. Bless the Lord, we have received a kingdom. Let us worship Him in that spirit of thankfulness which such a gift should excite.

More than this, we have received it in the *principles* of it, for it is written, “The kingdom of God is within you.” As the fairest flower lies packed away within the little shriveled seed, and needs but time and sun to develop all its beauty, so perfection, glory, immortality and unspeakable bliss lie slumbering and hidden away within the grace which God has given to all His people. “He that believes in Him has everlasting life.” The life of heaven is begun within the believer, it is germinating, it is daily developing, and it shall in God’s good time come to its absolute perfection. We have the kingdom within us; it is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God within a man is the earnest of heaven, and an earnest is of the same nature as that which it guarantees. We who are born unto God have the first fruits of the kingdom of God in possessing the indwelling Spirit, and in the first fruits we see the entire harvest. Rise to this, my brethren, and under a sense of your immeasurable indebtedness go forth and serve your God with joyful thankfulness. This is the spirit in which to worship the Lord who has given us the kingdom.

Moreover, in a measure we have received this kingdom in the *power* of it. Notice, the text does not say we have received a little lordship, a small estate, a scanty portion, but we have received a kingdom. No gift less than this could content the

great heart of our heavenly Father. He never stops half way in His march of mercy. He made us first His subjects, then His children, then His heirs, and here He makes us kings, for every heir of God is heir-apparent to a throne. "He has made us kings and priests unto God, and we shall reign with Him." Brethren, in the grace which God has given you, you received a measure of kingly power, you who have believed in Jesus have power over yourselves, power over your passions, power over the powers of evil, power in measure over your fellow men for their good. You have also power in prayer, and what a real power is that, when a man can ask what he wills and it shall be done unto him. God has endowed you with power from on high by giving you the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Thus you have received a kingdom in promise, in principle and in power.

Moreover, you have received much of *the provision and protection* of that kingdom. You that are children of God, are not left in the power of the enemy, but being redeemed the Lord is a wall of fire round about you. You are garrisoned by angelic strength; you are led by unfailing wisdom. The all-sufficiency of God is your treasure house. The Lord has said, "No good thing will I withhold from them that walk uprightly." This is a royal charter of boundless liberality. "For all things are yours. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

What royal provision is thus set apart for you! "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to His purpose." Everything is arranged for our benefit. There were two brothers, one of whom had been diligently attentive to his worldly business, to the neglect of true religion. He succeeded in accumulating considerable wealth. The other brother was diligent in the service of the Master, and had learned both to distribute to the

poor and for conscience's sake to forego many an opportunity of gain, so that when he lay sick and dying, he was in straitened circumstances. His brother somewhat upbraided him, remarking that if it had not been for his religion, he would not have been dependent upon others. With great calmness the saintly man replied, "Quiet! Quiet! O Tom, I have a kingdom not begun upon, and an inheritance I have not yet seen." Speak of laying up for a rainy day, we have infinite goodness laid up for them that fear the Lord, and none can rob us of it. Every child of God is as David when Samuel anointed him to a throne. He has a kingdom in reserve, secured by a covenant of salt.

This kingdom which we have received has come to us by grace alone. We could not have earned it, or merited it, or won it by our own strength, but the Lord has given it to us in Christ Jesus. He has taken the beggar from the dunghill and set him among princes. He has lifted us up from the ruin of the fall and redeemed us from the misery of our ungodly days, and He has enriched us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus. Shall we not serve Him out of gratitude for such inestimable benefits? No crack of the whip shall drive us to His service, for we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear. No fear of hell, no hope of deserving heaven shall urge us on to please our Lord. No, rather this shall be our song—

"Loved of my God, for Him again
With love intense I burn!
Chosen of Him before time began,
I choose Him in return."

Gratitude is the only fountain of acceptable service, without it the streams are far too defiled to flow in the paradise of God.

A large measure of the splendor of our kingdom lies in this, that it is a “kingdom that cannot be moved.” Other kingdoms go to pieces sooner or later. You and I, who are in middle life, can remember kingdoms that have been blown down by the wind, or toppled over at the blow of one brave man’s sword. Empires that have rivaled Caesar’s in apparent strength have been swept down like cobwebs. As houses made of a pack of cards, so have dynasties fallen never to rise again. There was one year in which our great caricaturist pictured kings and princes out at sea in little rowboats, tossed up and down by the wild waves of revolution. So frail was their tenure of power at that moment. Even today, I guarantee you, the last office I would choose would be that of an emperor in any country. A man might wisely prefer to take the post of a common crossing-sweeper rather than be a king, or even a president. As for the Empire of Russia, who would court its deadly honors? If those who deserve the most severe imaginable punishment for horrible crimes were compelled to be autocrats, it would be a punishment too heavy. What must be the strain upon the mind, the constant fear, the awful unrest of a man who has the sole control of millions, and has deadly foes upon his track? Glory be to God, our kingdom cannot be moved! Not even dynamite can touch our dominion. No power in the world, and no power in hell, can shake the kingdom which the Lord has given to His saints. With Jesus as our monarch we fear no revolution and no anarchy, for the Lord has established this kingdom upon a rock, and it cannot be moved or removed. When the sun and moon are blown out in darkness, and when the stars fall like the withered leaves of autumn, the kingdom in which we rejoice shall enjoy perpetual prosperity, as it is written, “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.” Receiving such a kingdom, what are we bound to do? I would gladly cast silver

chains about you to hold you fast to your Lord. I would fasten anew these silken chains upon you to bind you to your God. You have received a kingdom. You can never pay back the millionth part of what you owe. Today, however, let the sweet love of Christ constrain you to judge that if He made you kings, it is for you to crown Him King with all your hearts, and if He has given you a kingdom that cannot be moved by you, it is for you to be “steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord.”

Is it not a splendid thought that when we do anything for God, though it is but the simple offering of a prayer, or the helping of a fatherless child, we may do it with all the holy dignity of princely priests? A certain set of men arrogate to themselves exclusively the title of priests, and so deny the priesthood of every believer. In this they act like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, thrusting themselves into an office which does not belong to them, and intruding out the true priests of the living God. Has not the Lord said to all His people, “You are a royal priesthood”? As for any who receive a supposed priesthood by laying on of hands of bishops, we know nothing of them, except that they err, not knowing the true dignity of every believer. They intrude into this priesthood so far as they pretend to possess priestly power beyond the lowest child of God, for all that believe in Jesus are this day made priests unto Him. With what sacred orderliness, and saintly carefulness ought we to serve God, because we serve Him not as common persons, if we are indeed in Christ, but we worship Him as priests and kings. One of our early Saxon kings was rowed down the river Dee by Kenneth of Scotland, and seven other vassal kings, who each one tugged an oar while their lord reclined in state. The King of kings this day is served by kings, each man, each woman among us, is made royal by the very fact of holy service. Let us labor for God not as slaves, but as

kings! Alas, I confess that sometimes I have not served the Lord as a king. I have put on the ragged robes of my unbelief, and I have come up here mourning and groaning when I ought to have arrayed myself in royal apparel and served my Lord with joy and gladness. Some of God's own saints forget what they are, and where they are, and they go to His service as if it were toil and drudgery, laboring as if they were galley slaves, and not rejoicing as princes who wait upon a great king. Brethren, your high dignity should make you joyful, and you should perform the Lord's service with intense delight because of what He has done for you. It should be heaven upon earth to be allowed to do anything for Jesus. "Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably."

II. There is much to dwell upon in the first clause, but I must now turn to my second point. Acceptable service must be rendered to God **IN THE POWER OF DIVINE GRACE**. What says the apostle? "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably."

Note then that acceptable service to God is not offered in the power of nature, not even of nature at its best, when we call it good nature and philanthropy, but in the service of God everything must be the fruit of grace. You are to serve the Lord, not in the strength of your own wit or experience, or talent, but in the energy of the new life which God has given you, and in the power of the grace which is continually bestowed upon you moment by moment as you seek it of the Lord. "Let us have grace," says the apostle. I know sometimes you say, and say truly, "What a poor creature I am. How can I serve God? I have not this and that gift." Just so, do not attempt to serve Him in the power of gifts. Ask for grace, and then worship Him in the power of grace. It is wonderful how grace can make use of very slender gifts, and turns them to abundant account. It is great

grace that greatly honors God, and great grace is always to be had by the least among us. You may never be an orator but you may have great grace. You may never be an organizer and take the lead among your fellow Christians, but you may have much grace. You may never attain to ample wealth so as to be able to distribute largely of your substance to the poor, but you may have great grace. Therefore, let us have grace that we may serve God acceptably.

I should like to take these words out of their context, and hang them up for our motto as a church— “LET US HAVE GRACE.” Be this our prayer—whatever else we do not have, Lord, let us have grace. If this or that means of usefulness shall be denied us, yet let us have grace, grace in our hearts, grace in our speech, grace in our lives, and grace in our every breath. A true Christian should be like Aaron who had the holy oil not only on his head, but upon the skirts of his garments. Even in our little things, in our kitchen life, in our parlor life, something of the holy oil should be upon us. Abundance of grace is our need. Now, dear friends, have you been trying to serve God in the power of grace, or in the power of nature? Look well to it. Only grace can God accept, can He accept your labor?

In the margin of our Testaments—I mean those of the authorized version, which will never be parted with for the so-called revised version—in the margin of the authorized version we read, “Let us hold fast grace.” That is another motto I would like to give to this church, “LET US HOLD FAST GRACE.” To find grace is an act, to have grace is a state; to hold it fast is to make the act perpetual and the state continual. “Let us hold fast grace.” There is such a thing as serving God and losing grace while you are so doing. You may become like Martha, worried about your serving, and you may be cross with Mary because she does not work as you do, but preserves her heavenly communion. It is easy to have so much to do for Jesus that you

lose Him amid your cares. It is possible to be busy here and there, and to miss the essence of service by not holding fast grace. O to dip our feet in oil, so that every step shall have anointing with it, and in every movement we shall hold fast grace.

Now you may look at the new version if you like, and in the margin you will find another reading which is allowable, though it has no great certainty about it. There we read—"Let us have thankfulness." That grand word, *charis* or "grace," may be rendered, "thankfulness," and it is in a thankful spirit that we should serve God. You have received a kingdom; therefore serve God in the spirit of gratitude. Do everything, because you feel you must do it since such an infinite amount of love has been lavished upon you. No one suggested to the holy woman in the gospels to break her alabaster box over Jesus' head, it was her own thought and her own deed. Nobody even encouraged her to do it. Some rather looked disapprovingly upon her as she poured out the precious perfume, but she did it all for Jesus. She loved much, for much had been forgiven her. This is the true spirit of service. God keep us always filled with it! Let us have grace! Let us hold fast grace! And in the power of these three sentences we shall be helped to "serve God acceptably, with reverence, and godly fear."

III. But now, thirdly, we must advance another step. To "serve God acceptably" **WE MUST DO IT WITH REVERENCE.** These two words in the text are much mixed up in the various readings, and it is almost impossible to divide the sense between them with accuracy. But yet I think I shall give the whole sense even if I do not allot a due proportion of meaning to each separate word. Acceptable serving or worshipping of God must be done with "reverence." The word, according to Bishop Hopkins, signifies a holy shamefacedness. The angels veil their faces with their wings when they worship the Most

High, and we must veil ours with humility. The angels feel their own littleness when they stand before the presence of the dread Supreme. You and I who are much less than angels, and have sinned, should, when we come before God, be covered with blushes. Our heart should be filled with wonder that we are called to this high privilege, though we are so unworthy of it. Let each one feel “the Lord has made me a king, but what a marvel that this deed should be worked on me! Oh, that ever I should be called to such a noble estate as this!” If some poor girl were suddenly called away from the milk pail and lifted from poverty and hard servitude to be the bride of a prince, the very thought of it would bring crimson to her cheeks. “Can it be!” she would ask, and I can imagine that when she was brought to court there would be a noticeable bashfulness and shamefacedness about her. Such holy shame ought to be upon us whenever we stand before the Lord to minister unto Him. Is it not said, “You shall be ashamed and confounded, and never open your mouth any more”? Not because of a servile dread of God, but out of an overwhelming sense of His unutterable love we blush to be so highly favored.

This reverence, this shamefacedness, should come upon us when we remember what we were. When you stand up in a prayer meeting and pray, dear friends, some of you cannot help remembering the time when you could swear or sing a questionable song. You are accepted among your brethren and honored by them, but the time was when you kept very different company, do you not blush as you think of it? You may not only think of what you were, but of what you are, because even now, though God favors you by allowing you to do Him service, yet you know what evil lurks within you. A very hell of corruption lies within the best saint, and if the grace of God did not restrain it, he would soon be found among the chief of sinners.

Moreover, bashfulness should be created not only by the thought of what you might be, but by a sight of your service itself. Perhaps your fellow creatures are saying, "That is well done," but you will go home and lament to yourself, saying, "Ah, they do not know my faults. They little know what mean motives cropped up even when I was trying to glorify my God." "That was a fine sermon," said one to Mr. Bunyan. The good man answered, "You are too late; the devil told me that before I left the pulpit." Satan soon suggests to God's servants some lofty notion, and they are tempted to appropriate to themselves the honor which belongs only to God. Ah, what a fool I am that, even when I seek to be lowest at the feet of my Lord, I find myself satisfied with my humility! Do we not too often rather mimic humility than actually attain to it? Besides, it should always make us blush to think of the dignity of the service to which we are called, for who are we and what is our father's house that the Lord should have brought us to this? Servants of God! You Knights of the Garter, you princes of the blood royal, what are all your earthly honors when compared with the holy dignity of servants of the Most High? Oh, that in the spirit of lowly gratitude we may always serve the thrice-holy One!

IV. The other word is, "with godly fear," and this suggests that we should serve God **IN THE SPIRIT OF HOLY CHEERFULNESS**. What sort of fear is this? For, "perfect love casts out fear, because fear has torment." Observe that it is the fear that has torment which perfect love casts out, but not this godly fear, which is quite consistent with our joy in receiving a kingdom. The more we have of this godly fear the better for us. We ought to fear lest we should offend the Lord even while we are serving Him, fear lest the sacrifice should be a blemished one, and so be rejected at the altar, fear lest there should be something about our spirit and temper which would grieve the

Lord. He is a jealous God, and must be served with holy carefulness. O for more of it! I do not know how my brethren feel who say they are perfect, but I am obliged to confess that when I would do good, evil is present with me, and that though I would serve God like a seraph, without one stray thought, or one selfish desire, yet I have by no means reached this attainment. I press forward towards the mark, and hope to reach it, but it is at present far beyond me. Oh, brethren and sisters, much of holy fear should be upon us, because we may so easily offend the Lord when we think we are pleasing Him. Beware of presumptuous boldness before God. Let us not be rash with our speech, much less rude and coarse. I know that modes of worship which offend *my* taste may, nevertheless, be accepted with God, because He sees through the rough shell, and judges according to the sweet kernel. Yet I fear that thoughtless, bragging, noisy service must offend the Lord, for it is so unlike that which was offered by His gentle, tender, well-beloved Son. If Christ is the model which He sets before us, some are far away from the mark. At any rate, let us never wantonly go into a wild, boisterous mannerism, for though we are the Lord's children, and very near to Him, yet He is in heaven and we are upon the earth. He is the thrice holy, and we are sinners. The psalmist says, "Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling."

There is another form of godly fear which comes over every genuine Christian at times—the fear lest after all he should not be serving God at all. What if I have preached to others and should be after all merely preaching because it is my vocation! What if you should be teaching in the Sunday school, and should be doing it only because it is customary for professing people of your station to have some good work to do! My dear brethren, it is not for me to doubt you, and I do not doubt you half as much as I doubt myself, but it is necessary

that we question ourselves as to whether we are indeed the servants of God, or are living for ourselves.

Knowing that God is to be served in His own way and in that alone, there ought to be a godly fear as to whether we are walking in His ordinances or are following the traditions of men. God does not care for worship which He has never required at our hands. If a man invents a ceremony, he may think it helpful and instructive, but he has no right to practice it if God has not appointed it. If any of you are practicing rites and ceremonies which are not according to God's Word, I charge you cease from such will-worship, for the spirit which leads you to practice these things is the spirit of Rome, and of antichrist. If God has not commanded it, God cannot accept it. Not only are we to worship the true God only, which is the law of the first commandment, but we must worship the true God in His own way, which is the spirit of the second commandment. The second commandment as it forbids all worshipping of God through images, does in the spirit of it, forbid all worshipping of God in any other way than He has prescribed. Therefore when you stand before the Lord, ask yourself, "Did He require this service of me? Is this the way in which He would be worshipped?" For if not it is no better than idolatry, and cannot be accepted by the living God. Oh, what fear and trembling, what solemn awe, what sacred carefulness, should fall upon the man who draws near to serve and worship the Lord our God!

V. Now, lastly, there is another thing to be remembered in acceptable services. We must cultivate A **PROFOUND SENSE OF THE DIVINE HOLINESS** and of the wrath of God against sin, "For our God is a consuming fire." Observe, then, from this most solemn sentence, that the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. Read Deuteronomy 4:24 and you will find these words, "For the Lord your God is a

consuming fire, even a jealous God.” The same words describe the God of the New Testament. I know the boasted wisdom of the age tells us that we have made a great advance upon Old Testament revelation. It is not so. We may understand the Book somewhat better, but the revelation is the same. God wears the same character as in the days of Moses, David and the prophets.

The Lord God who is to be served by us, even as our covenant God, is a “consuming fire.” In love He is severely holy, sternly just. We hear people say—“God out of Christ is a consuming fire,” but that is an unwarrantable alteration of the text. The text is, “Our God,” that is God in Christ is a consuming fire. “Our God” means God in covenant with us. It means our Father God, our God to whom we are reconciled, He, even our God is still a “consuming fire.” A large proportion of nominal Christians do not believe in this God. They profess reverence to a merciful God, but the moment you preach His justice, they are indignant. The God who is a consuming fire is not accepted by this proud “19th Century.” I do this day most solemnly declare my faith in the God of the Hebrews, who will by no means spare the guilty. The God, of Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob is the one and only God, and I declare Him this day to be my God. Jehovah is the Holy One of Israel, the God of the whole earth shall He be called. He that smote Pharaoh at the Red Sea, He that smote kings and slew mighty kings, is my God, and I believe in Him as the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I know no God but Abraham’s God, Jehovah, the I AM. Under the New Testament, God is not an atom less severe than under the Old, and under the covenant of grace the Lord is not a particle less righteous than under the law. We are so saved by mercy that no sin goes unpunished; the law is as much honored under the gospel as under the law. The substitution of Jesus as much

displays the wrath of God against sin as even the flames of hell would do. While the Lord is merciful, infinitely so, and His name is love, yet still our God is a consuming fire, and sin shall not live in His sight. If your offering and mine are evil, it will be an abomination unto Him. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, if our worship and service are mingled with hypocrisy and pride, He will not endure them.

You will be rather surprised when I say that this dreadful sentence is my hope, it is a joy to me that our God is a consuming fire. Behold two altars upon Carmel. The Baalites have laid their victim upon one of them. Do you see them as they prance about the altar and even leap upon it? Do you hear them as they cry and cut themselves with knives and lancets? “O Baal, hear us! O Baal, hear us!” There lies the sacrifice, there is no trace of Baal’s hearing them, for their god is not a consuming fire. Now Elijah comes. “Pour water,” he says, “on the bullock. Do it a second time. Do it a third time.” And they fetch up from the sea huge buckets, and pour the water over everything until the trenches are filled with it. And now the prophet lifts up his prayer to heaven. Down comes the fire! It is God’s sacrifice, and God accepts it. He is a consuming fire, and the token of His presence is so manifest that the people cry, “Jehovah, He is the God, He is the God.” Turn your eyes again to Solomon’s temple, gorgeous with gold and precious stones. The king pleads with the Lord of the whole earth to accept the shrine. Lo, the priests are present in their robes of office, and the sacrifice is waiting on the altar. If no fire descends, there is no acceptance. But we read, “The fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering, and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the house.” If I am a true and sincere man, and if I am believing in Jesus, and I have brought my humble sacrifice with fear and reverence before

God, then it will be accepted, for He is a consuming fire, and my sacrifice will be consumed, and go up to Him.

It may be, some of you who have been working this week will think to yourselves, “We did very well, we hope to be honored for it.” So you shall be, but if you take credit to yourselves, you will be robbing the altar of God. If God accepts your sacrifice, it will all be consumed by His fire. Look, the accepted sacrifice is all gone, it is utterly consumed. When God enables us to serve Him, and takes away from us all self-congratulation, we ought to be very thankful. This proves that it is all burned with fire. If God had not accepted it, then we might have reserved portions of it for ourselves, to feed our vanity, and that would be to feed ourselves without fear. But if the Lord has taken every morsel from the mouth of self, we have great cause for rejoicing. If the Lord accepts us, His fire will consume us, the zeal of His house will eat us up.

When we go home to the Lord above, we dread not His presence, though He is a consuming fire. Those whom He has purified and made white are not afraid of the flames of His holiness. Remember that blessed text, “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burning? He that walks righteously and speaks uprightly, He that despises the gain of oppressions, that shakes his hands from the holding of bribes, that stops his ears from the hearing of blood, and shuts his eyes from seeing evil, he shall dwell on high.” It shall be the glory of the gracious and the true, that God is their element. It shall be their bliss to live in the full splendor of His perfect holiness. They shall be like their Lord, for they shall see Him as He is. Everything that is holy will endure the fire, and as for all within us that is impure, let it be consumed speedily. So let us serve the Lord with fear, but not with terror, and let this service be continued all our days.

Let us bring the sacrifices of the last week to Him, with repentance for every fault, humbly pleading that by His grace He will accept it, and earnestly desiring that all we have done may redound to His glory through Jesus Christ His Son, to whom be honor, world without end. Amen.

1640 THE TOUCH – MARK 5:30-31

A Sermon

Delivered on Sunday Evening, January 8, 1882,

by the

REV. C. H. SPURGEON

At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that virtue had gone out of Him, turned Him about in the press, and said, “Who touched My clothes?” And His disciples said to Him, “You see the multitude thronging You, and say You, Who touched Me?” — Mark 5:30-31

WE JUST NOW tread the story of this woman who was immediately healed. Spiritual persons know that the miracles recorded by the evangelist are true, because they have seen them reproduced. That is to say, we have not seen an issue of blood stopped by the touch of Christ's garments, but we have seen the spiritual counterpart of it. We have seen men and women healed of all kinds of spiritual and moral diseases by coming into contact with our Lord Jesus. They have touched Jesus, and they have been made whole, for Jesus lives still, and His healing work is not ended, but has only entered on another phase. Jesus has said, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world,” and being with us, He is not here inactively or ineffectually, but He is here, the same yesterday, today, and forever, to work the same miracles, only not on men's bodies, but on their souls. Jesus is present to heal leprosies of the mind, and to open the eyes of the understanding. Yes, He is still among us to raise those who are dead in trespasses and sins.

Though we live in a great leper house, yet are we comforted because we see that Jesus walks the hospitals, and still heals on the right hand and on the left, all those who come into contact with Him. At the sight of His wonders of grace, we cry out as they did in the days of His flesh, “He has done all things well.”

As the miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ are pictures of His wondrous works in the spiritual kingdom, so are they instructive, because they set forth much impressive and precious truth most vividly. Tonight I have but one desire, and that is to lead some poor sin-sick soul to Jesus, and I shall not be satisfied unless very many shall this evening for the first time, break through this crowd and press forward to touch the hem of Christ's robe and find immediate healing.

I shall speak upon three things, first, upon *this wonderful person*, who, if He is but touched, gives out a healing virtue. Secondly, I shall speak upon *that very remarkable touch*, which is clearly a distinct thing from the touch and pressure of the eager, curious crowd. And then we will ask you to answer *the singular personal question* which the Savior puts to this assembly, “Who touched Me?” Perhaps there are some here tonight who will be able to say with trembling assurance, “I touched Him and He has made me whole.” May the Holy Spirit cause it to be so.

I. First, then, I have the blessed work, far beyond my power, but oh, how sweet to my soul, of speaking upon **THIS WONDERFUL PERSON**.

The Lord Jesus Christ, as He stood in the midst of the crowd, was charged with a power which is called by our translators, “virtue.” An efficacious healing force was in Him. Sometimes He emitted it by words, frequently by the touch of His hand, and in this case, it seemed to stream even from His garments when He was but fitly and properly touched. He was charged with omnipotent blessing, and those who came into contact with Him were made whole. Do not think, dear friends,

that He is less full of benedictions for the sons of men tonight. No, if I may venture to say as much, He is fuller of healing power, for He has bowed His head to death and worn the crown of thorns, and He has risen from the tomb and gone up into glory leading captivity captive. In our midst at this moment He is, if it is possible, more charged with energy to bless than even when He walked the fields of Palestine, and healed the feeble men and women of His time.

Observe that Christ's power to bless lay mainly in *the fact of His Deity*. That humble, weary, wayworn man was the Son of the Highest. Because He was still very God of very God, His will was omnipotent. He but spoke to fever or leprosy, and they went at His bidding, even as the centurion put it, "I am a man under authority, and I say unto this man, Go, and he goes, and to my servant, Do this, and he does it." Even so, the divine Christ did but will it, and diseases fled at His bidding. He is not less divine today. At this hour He cries, "Look unto Me and be you saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else."

But His power to bless us lay also in *the fact that He had become man* for our sake. I speak with lowly reverence, but "it behoved Christ to suffer." He found it necessary to be compassed with infirmities that He might save us from our infirmities. He was able to heal not only because He was God, but because He was Emmanuel, God with Us. Oh, the blessed mystery of the incarnation! What a fount of mercy it is to us miserable sinners! He that spanned the heavens condescended to be wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. He that bears up the pillars of the universe was Himself weary here below, and by His weakness gave us strength. Because He took our sicknesses, therefore is He able to deliver us from spiritual sickness and make us every bit whole. Oh, see, my brethren,

God incarnate present among us, “able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him.”

In addition to this, it is never to be forgotten that our blessed Master, being both divine and human, was also *endowed with the Holy Spirit without measure*. Often are we told in Scripture that He was able to do these mighty signs and wonders, because the Holy Spirit was with Him. Even now that same Holy Spirit is with Him in plenitude of power. Jesus, whom I preach to you, the man of Nazareth, the mighty God, has the residue of the Spirit by which power He can remove from us all the guilt and power of sin, and can make us perfectly whole, that is, holy.

Is not this something to be delighted in—that there should be such a Savior and such a Savior accessible tonight? The blessed physician of souls can heal every sort of spiritual malady. I am able to say that I have seen Him heal such maladies. I think I have been witness to the cure of every sort of sin. At any rate, He is healing me of my own maladies, and I am under His tender care, persuaded that He will make even me perfectly whole before He has done with me. I have seen the proud man, who could not otherwise have been cured of his haughtiness, come and sit at Jesus' feet and learn of Him, until he has been made meek and lowly. I have seen the obstinate man come to Jesus and gladly take Christ's yoke upon him, and become willingly and joyfully obedient to the supreme will of Him who bought him with His blood. Often I have seen the unclean and the lascivious enticed to Jesus by His gentleness, and they have been made pure. Now, often have these eyes seen the despairing that have been on the verge of madness cheered and comforted till they have sung for joy of heart. How frequently have I seen the coward made brave, the morose made gentle, the revengeful made forgiving, by coming into contact with Jesus! You cannot love my Lord and love sin. You cannot trust my Lord and yet delight yourselves in iniquity.

Only get near to Him, and He will begin a cure upon your character, and before long, will perfect it. If your malady should be a delight in the pleasures and the pursuits of the world, He will teach you not to love the world, or the things of it. Do you suffer from selfishness? He shall teach you to deny yourselves. His lance and nails and cross shall crucify you with Himself till self-seeking shall die. Are you afflicted with a sloth that will not let you be active? My Master's zeal shall fire your soul till, like Him, you shall be consumed with energy. I do not care what your fault is, my brother or my sister, but this I know; there is power in my divine Lord and Master to redeem you from that fault. He can destroy evil and create good. Behold, He makes all things new!

Ah, now, if I were addressing myself to a number of persons that were blind, or deaf, or sick, and I told them that Christ was here to heal them of their bodily infirmities, what a rush there would be. Set Jesus up in Trafalgar Square to be touched by all manner of sick folk, and I guarantee you the crowd would press one another to death in their eagerness to get at Him. But, surely, spiritual maladies are worse. It is worse to have a blind spiritual eye than a blind bodily eye. But men do not think so and consequently they are not anxious for spiritual health. I may praise up my Master, as I gladly would, even to the skies, and yet men will care nothing for Him, for they would just as soon be morally and spiritually sick as not, and some of them are even proud of their sicknesses. Well, what shall become of you? In that day when God shuts out the spiritually sick folk—the diseased, the pestilential, the putrid, the corrupt—when He casts them into hell because they cannot be permitted to stand among His saints in His holy house in heaven, whose fault shall it be that you were not healed? Who shall bear the blame that you died in your sins?

Not the Lord Jesus Christ, but yourselves, because you chose your own delusions, and would have none of Him.

Thus have I feebly tried to set Him forth, and oh, how I would that you desired Him and longed for Him, for He is here, and a touch of Him will save you! Poor souls, must He pass you by?

II. And now, secondly, I want to say a little, by God's help, about **THE REMARKABLE TOUCH OF THIS WOMAN.**

Such a touch as hers may be given to Jesus at this good hour. We cannot by our finger literally touch His mantle, but there is a spiritual touch that can still be given to Christ, which will draw virtue out of Him, so that all our spiritual diseases shall straightway be healed. This contact is not always described in Scripture as a touch, sometimes it is represented as hearing. "Incline your ear and come unto Me. Hear and your soul shall live." There is a link between you and me tonight in the fact that I speak and you hear. Well, a spiritual connection, of which this is the analogy, if it is set up between Christ and you, will cure you of your sin. Sometimes this contact is described as being formed by a look. This is the favorite symbol. "Look unto Me and be you saved, all you ends of the earth." It is apparently a very meager connection which is set up by a glance, and yet if you have such a contact between you and Christ as the eye made between the dying Israelite and the brazen serpent, it will save you. Here in this narrative the contact is symbolized by a touch. The patient by her touch was linked with Jesus, and felt in her body that she was healed of her plague.

Now, do you not wish to touch Jesus and to be made whole, that is, holy? If you do, remember that the touch must be a voluntary one. If any of you were brought into a supposed connection with Christ when you were children, without consciousness of what was done, I charge you do not put any confidence in the ceremony. Religion performed for you, when

you were unconscious and gave no consent to it, cannot possibly save you. Whatever there might be in it, there is nothing saving in it. You must come into a voluntary union with Jesus if you would be made whole. It must be an intentional contact. Some were pressed against the Savior as they pushed against each other and as the crowd surged to and fro, but this woman was not driven against Christ without her consent. Oh no, she was eager to get at Him. She pushed, she struggled, and at last, she reached the fringe of His mantle, and a contact was established intentionally by her finger. She wished to be made whole and she touched Christ with that view. You, too, must come to Jesus with the view of being delivered from the guilt, penalty, and power of sin, and you must get into contact with Christ with the intent that He should be your Savior. I entreat you to see to this, and may the Holy Spirit lead you to do it at once.

“Oh,” you say, “but I do not know how to get into contact with the Savior.” The best way, the only way, is by believing in Him. If you, tonight, say in your heart, “I trust Christ to save me,” there is immediately a contact between you and Christ of the right kind, you are the trusting one, and He is the person trusted in. There is a point of union between you and Christ and this will save you, for there never was one yet that did wholly trust the blood and righteousness of Jesus without finding himself fully justified in so trusting. The rule of the kingdom is—“According to your faith so be it unto you.” If your faith is only as a grain of mustard seed, if it is genuine faith, it shall work in you the cure of your soul’s disease, and you shall live unto righteousness. The point of contact is a main consideration, and I pray you look to it. Do you not see that when the woman’s finger touched Christ’s garment there was established at once a connection between the two, along which the divine virtue flashed? I will not illustrate this by electricity,

for such a figure will suggest itself to you all, but the fact is that faith sets up a contact between the sinner and Christ, and through this the healing virtue comes to us.

Faith on our part is an act of reception. We agree to receive Christ as what God has made Him to be, a propitiation for sin. We accept Him as our Savior, Teacher, Leader, Ruler, and in all these senses He is ours. Whatever God the Father says that Jesus is, we agree that He is that, and we take Him to ourselves to be all that to us. Especially since He has come to save His people, we accept Him as our Savior. I have sometimes quoted to you the words of Luther, who often put a truth so broadly that he overshadowed other truths, and uttered language which would not bear to be closely looked into, though most fit to set forth his immediate meaning. Luther says, "I will have nothing to do with saving myself. Jesus Christ is a Savior; I leave my soul wholly in His hands." That puts it very broadly, but it is what I mean within a little, that is to say, you must just go and say, "I cannot deliver myself from the power of sin, but I know that Jesus can deliver me and I put myself into His hands that He may do it." When faith thus unites us to Jesus, the healing virtue will flow from Him to us.

"Oh, well," says one, "I have often heard you preach about being saved from sinning by Christ, but I do not feel that I can do anything." Just so, that is why I want you to get Christ to work in you, and for you. "Oh, but I am nobody." That is the very sort of person I delight to find, that Jesus Christ may make you into somebody, and say, "Somebody has touched Me." Nobody is made into somebody when he once touches Jesus Christ. "Oh, but I am—." There will be no end to these objections, and therefore let me say plainly, never mind what you are. The question is, "What is the Lord Jesus Christ?" If He is able to save you, trust Him, rely upon Him, and rest your soul with Him. Did I hear one reply, "I do not see how that

will make me better”? My speedy answer is that faith, simple as it seems, is the one thing which, by God’s grace, shall make you a new man. Here is the philosophy of it—if you trust Jesus, you will love Him, if you love Him, you will serve Him. Believing that Jesus has saved you, gratitude springs up in your heart and becomes the motive power by which a new life is begun and continued. I pray you try it. I remember years ago when I tried the power of faith in Jesus. It was a poor, feeble, trembling touch that I gave to Christ, but by it from sadness and despair I rose to gladness and hope. I had something to live for, and I had the expectation of being able to accomplish it, too, when I had touched Him. And at this hour, when I am sick and sad and sorry and sinful, I go to Him, and I am blest. If I need washing, He must wash me. If I need clothing, He must clothe me. If I need strength, He must invigorate me. He is all in all to my soul, and so I do but tell you what I know myself, and persuade you by my own experience to Him.

III. Lastly, the poor woman, having touched the hem of Christ’s garment, and being made whole, was about to slink away, when the Master asked **THE REMARKABLE QUESTION** which brought her to the front, so that she was obliged to confess what Christ had done for her.

I would to God that all of you who have felt the power of Christ would bear testimony to the fact. As a rule those who have been converted in this place have not been backward to confess Christ, but still, some among you who love my Lord have never yet avowed your attachment to Him. You are on Christ’s side, but you do not wear His uniform, and acknowledge His cause. You do not confess Him, though He has promised that those who do so, He will confess at the last. We are all too fond of ease, and so it happens in this world of ours, that much of the force of goodness remains unused because men are inactive and retiring. Who covets the front of

the battle? Only a bold, brave man whose heart God has touched. He comes to the front, and remains the butt of opposition when prudence might dictate that he should shelter himself from the conflict. Oh, my dear friend, if you love Jesus Christ, my Master, I ask you never to be ashamed to be on His side, and on the side of the right and the true, the just, and the kind. Take your place like a man, and avow yourself a soldier of the cross. Too many are like the timid woman of our text; they receive benefits from Jesus, and then try to lose themselves in the crowd. I will tell you a little about that.

The touch that brings virtue out of Christ is one that cannot be perceived by our fellow men. That young man over yonder touched Christ tonight, but he who sits close to him is not aware of it. The saving act is done in secret, and sometimes it is almost a secret to the person himself. He hardly dares to think that he has been so bold. This poor woman shrank into herself, she knew that she was cured, but she was afraid to think of what she had done to get the cure. I have known many poor souls believe in Christ and yet feel as if it were presumption to do so. It appears to a truly humbled conscience to be so great a mercy to be forgiven, that it feels hardly justified in daring to think that Jesus could have put away its sin. Listen to me, you who are trembling. Let not your fears rob your Lord of His honor. You must confess your faith, for Jesus loves that those whom He heals should acknowledge it. That is why He turned round and said, “Who touched My clothes?” He delights in that tender acknowledgment, wet with many tears. If you have done good to one of your neighbors, you think it hard if no word of thanks is spoken. I have known benevolence almost shriveled up for lack of gratitude. My Master is not of such a temper, but still He welcomes words of humble acknowledgment. He loves to hear the bleating of the sheep which His shoulders have brought back to the fold. He loves that much love comes of

having much forgiven. Do not, then, hold your tongue. If Jesus has indeed healed you, tell Him of it, and tell His people of it to His praise. Such grace ought to be known. Is there anything to be ashamed of? For my part I glory in being saved by Christ. If he that is a Christian is a fool, write me down among the fools. Say you not so, poor working brother? When you go into the workshop and they say, “These Christian people are a set of hypocritical Presbyterians,” will you not answer, “Then put me down among them”? If your Lord and Master did not grudge to stand in the stocks for you till they spit in His face, what a coward you must be if you ever draw back from avowing your faith in Him from the fear of ridicule. If He acknowledged your cause even unto death, never blush to be regarded as His follower. Let every cowardly thought be banished from your spirit. If Jesus saved you from going down into the pit and made you a new creature, never be ashamed in any company to say, “Christ has made me whole and therefore I am His.”

From that day, the healed woman and Jesus had instituted a friendship that never ended. They had conversed together, and their lives were openly linked together. Would you not wish the same thing to happen to you?

To this woman Christ said, “Go in peace.” What a blessing she gained by being fetched out of her hiding place, for had she gone away without an open confession, she might often have been disturbed in mind by the fear that a stolen cure would not be permanent. The Master said, “Go in peace,” and a profound calm fell upon her spirit, as when the sea birds sit on the waves and all the winds have fallen into a deep sleep. She was a happy woman from that day, for Jesus had said, “Go in peace,” and what could trouble her?

Now, it may be that some of you who love Christ will go to heaven safely enough. But you will miss a mint of comfort on the road because you have never openly confessed that you

belong to Christ. Perhaps certain of you will never get peace till you acknowledge your discipleship, and link your whole life with Jesus. When you do that, and take up His cross with all its shame, and are known to be a Christian in every society into which you enter, then shall your peace be like a river.

I have done, only I would put to the whole congregation the question, “Who has touched Christ tonight?” O that some would answer in their hearts, “I have touched Him tonight by faith.” Why should you not all trust the appointed Savior? Do you tell me that you do not understand what faith is? It is, trusting—trusting wholly upon the person, work, merit, and power of the Son of God. Some think this trusting to be a strange business, but indeed it is the simplest thing that can possibly be. To some of us, truths which were once hard to believe are now matters of fact, about which we should find it hard to doubt. If one of our grandfathers were to rise from the dead, and come into the present state of things, what a deal of trusting he would have to do. He would say tomorrow morning, “Where are the flint and steel? I need a light.” And we should give him a little box with tiny pieces of wood in it, and tell him to strike one of them on the box. He would have to trust a good deal before he would believe that fire would thus be produced. We would next say to him, “Now that you have a light, turn that tap and light the gas.” He sees nothing, but is annoyed with an offensive smell. How can he believe that light will come of that invisible vapor? And yet it does. “Now come with us, grandfather. Sit in that chair. Look at that box in front of you. You shall have your likeness directly.” “No, child,” he would say “it is ridiculous. The sun takes my portrait? I cannot believe it.” “Yes, and you shall ride 50 miles in an hour without horses.” “I do not believe it,” he says. “What is more, you shall speak to your son in New York, and he shall answer you in a few minutes.” Should we not astonish the old gentleman?

Would he not need all his faith? And yet these things are believed by us without effort, because experience has made us familiar with them. Faith is greatly needed by you who are strangers to spiritual things. You seem lost while we are talking about them, and our very words puzzle you. But oh, how simple it is to us who have the new life and have communion with spiritual realities. We have a Father to whom we speak and He hears us, and a blessed Savior who hears our heart's longings, and helps us in our struggles against sin. It is all plain to him that understands. May the Spirit of God bring every one of you to understand it! What a joy it would be, if we all touched the Savior, should all be healed of sin, and all be admitted to stand at His right hand forever. Then, whoever we may be, and however much we may differ in rank and talent, we shall all heartily join to sing the new song, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive honor and glory forever and ever, Amen."

1641 GREAT SPOIL – PS. 119:162

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, January 22, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

I rejoice at Your word, as one that finds great spoil.
— Psalm 119:162

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Psalm 119:145-168]

IN THE PRECEDING VERSE, David had avowed his reverence for God's word in the following language, "My heart stands in awe of Your word." It is clear that holy awe is perfectly consistent with intense delight. Fear seems to stand far apart from joy, and yet in the experience of the child of God they are next of kin. We are familiar with combinations such as this, "They returned from the sepulcher with fear and great joy." "Happy is the man that fears always." "Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling." These two emotions are like two notes which apart, are widely different, but sound harmoniously together. The one is far down and the other is high up in the scale, but they melt into one with sweet accord in the experience of God's people. It is a blessed thing both to reverence the word and to have an intense joy in it. May we all know what the mixed emotion means.

More than this, I will go the length of saying that unless we do have deep awe of the word, we shall never have high joy over it. Our rejoicing will be measured by our reverence. If I

think upon the Bible, as some seem to do, as though it were an ordinary piece of literature, I shall have no very special joy in it. Or if I rise no higher than many critics of the present day, and conceive the holy book to be in a certain sense inspired, but still to be marred with imperfection and open to rectification by the growing intelligence of the age—if I have such small reverence for the word, I shall have a correspondently little joy in it. A man rejoices in gold rather than in clay because the gold is more precious, and as the treasure rises in value, so his delight in it will rise. The more, then, we think of the Scriptures, the greater will be our delight in them if we see that they relate to us. “Your word is very pure: therefore Your servant loves it.” If they become to us the infallible voice of truth, that pure light which never misleads, that metal which is entirely free from alloy, then will our joy in Holy Writ overflow as we read in it the mind and will of our Father in heaven. And then shall we borrow the language of the psalmist, saying first, “My heart stands in awe of Your word,” and next, “I rejoice at Your word, as one that finds great spoil.”

Observe, dear friends, concerning this joy of David in the word which he revered, that he expresses it with a martial figure. My text is quite a soldierly verse, “I rejoice at Your word, as one that finds great spoil.” It is a figure taken from men of war, who after they have overcome their enemy divide the plunder among them. This expression is most natural as coming from David. David had been a soldier from his youth up, and he knew personally and literally what it was to divide the spoil, therefore he did not go far to find his metaphor, but plucked it from the garden of his own life. How I like to hear men both in prayer and praise speak like themselves! I notice that if a sailor has been converted to God, he can in cool blood utter proper sentences, such as one might borrow from collects and forms of prayer, but if his soul grows warm within him, he

ceases to speak according to the books, and begins to pray like an “ancient mariner.” When he breaks through the bonds of restraint and gets quite free, he takes you among the rolling billows and many of his expressions have a salt spray upon them, possibly also a suspicion of yarn and pitch. You soon find that you have fallen in with a shipmate whose soul has done business on the great waters. So must it be with the soldier. If cold, dead propriety rules him, you will not know whether he is a soldier or a citizen, but let him grow enthusiastic, let his very heart speak out, and his speech betrays him. Wars and rumors of wars are in his utterances; he sings and prays to martial music. Therefore I like to hear David saying that his heart rejoices at God’s word as one that finds great spoil, for it is his own manner of speech, and sounds fitly from a warrior. Do not cut away the naturalness of yours utterances in prayer, never grow so strictly proper, as to pray like somebody else. You may take a bird and teach it to pipe half-a-dozen set notes, and it will be thought to be a wonder, but no piping bullfinch in the world, to my ear, sings so sweetly as the finches in my own garden, whose wild songs are all their own. The labored notes of the trained bird’s little tune may be remarkable, but are they not also somewhat grotesque and unnatural? The notes of nature more truly reveal the bird, and are a fitter utterance for it than the ditty it has learned so painfully. It is a pity that men should speak with God in a constrained and artificial style; it far more befits them to pray in their own natural manner. If you are farmers, or artisans, or laborers, be not ashamed that your speech should savor of your calling. If you are soldiers, pray like soldiers. Let your true selves speak out when you speak with God, for He is truth itself, and needs not that you put on artificial manners in His presence.

Having thus prefaced my discourse, I come to look into this joy of David over God’s word, which he compares to the

joy of a warrior when he finds great spoil. To such overflowing joy we are not strangers, we feel quite at home with the text.

I. Let me first observe that **THIS GREAT JOY IS SOMETIMES AROUSED BY THE FACT THAT THERE IS A WORD OF GOD.**

This is true if we regard the Scriptures as *a revealing of God*. After going up and down in the world searching after deity, it is a great delight to come upon a book in which the one only living and true God has unveiled Himself to those who care to behold Him. It is a great “find” for a man to discover that after all he is not left in a fog to grope his way, but that God has kindled a sun that honest hearts may walk in the light of and in that light see all things clearly. I say that a revelation of God is a great discovery over which a man rejoices “as one that finds great spoil.” For, dear friends, there can be no revealing of God except by God Himself. The apostle Paul tells us very truly that the things of a man know no man, but the spirit of a man that is in him. You cannot read a man until that man brings out somewhat from within and thus reveals himself. A man must speak, or act, or we cannot know his mind. The chief means of a man’s revealing himself is by his word, language is the gate of the soul. If the man is true and honest, his word will be a window through which you may see his mind. Even so, says the apostle, as the heart of a man is only known to the man himself, so the things of God know no man but the Spirit of God. The divine thought must be hidden in the heart of God forever until the Spirit of God is pleased to tell it to us. There is therefore an absolute necessity for a revelation, since none can, by searching, find God. This written word is the revelation of God, and when the Spirit of God shines upon it, we see the Lord as in a mirror. Oh, but what a blessing that the Spirit of God should still be with His people, bearing witness with the word which He has of old inspired! What a comfort that we

have this sure word of testimony in which God has spoken to us in terms so distinct, so clear, so unquestionable. He who feels the power of this revelation in his own soul may well rejoice “as one that finds great spoil.”

Nor does our valuation of Holy Scripture depend upon this one view of it, for we also prize it as *the guide of our life*. Often we come to positions in which we know not which way to take. It is a great discomfort to have to be questioning, questioning, and forever questioning. To hear within the soul the inquiries “How?”, “What?”, “Which?”, “When?”, and to be confused by dubious voices, is a great affliction, suspense is killing. How delightful to turn over the sacred page and find in them guidance like that of the Urim and Thummim of old. This Book tells us the right and bids us follow it. It teaches us the way of wisdom, and the path of understanding, and supplies motives for walking in them. Submitting ourselves to the Spirit of God, we hear Him speak in this volume and say, “This is the way, walk you in it.” As a bewildered wanderer in a forest hails the light in a cottage window, hoping to find a guide there to set him on his homeward path, so we do hail the light of Holy Writ which shines in a dark place. As the mariner prizes his chart and compass, so we do welcome the law of the Lord. Tossed on the changing sea of life, our eyes are gladdened by the clear ray of this pole-star of heaven, the fixed light of God.

If we had been left to blind reason, we would soon have stumbled into the ditch, but with inspiration to conduct us, we have a plain path before us and are glad. No longer in a perpetual quandary, guessing and surmising, the way of life is definitely mapped out for us, and we pursue our route with confidence, knowing that, “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.” This becomes our daily song, “You shall guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive

me to glory.” O happy man that finds such sure direction as this! He can rejoice “as one that finds great spoil.”

More than this, if you think of it, dear friends, a word from God apprehended in the soul is *a sure pledge of mery*. Consider what words those words of God are, how full of love, and grace, and tenderness. I will not stay to quote the exceedingly great and precious promises, for they are, I hope, your daily food. You know what great things the Lord has spoken concerning you. But here is a thought worth pondering—these promises are backed by the word of God, no, they are each one the word of God. When a man has given his word, if he is an upright, honorable man, there is an end to further questions, he has pledged his word and that is enough. Now the Lord has given to His people His word, His right honorable word that cannot be broken, which must stand fast forever and ever. Happy are those who are willing to take God at His word, and accept His promise as the equivalent for the thing promised, for what the Lord has promised He will surely perform. When a man grasps a promise of forgiveness, of acceptance in prayer, of sanctifying grace, of daily providence, of divine anointing, of comfort in death, or of eternal glory, he may well rejoice “as one that finds great spoil.” Within the word of promise there lies the blessing itself. The word is to the apprehension of faith, the substance of the thing hoped for. That which is guaranteed by God—who cannot lie—is already ours. He may well rejoice that finds it.

Notice still further, that Holy Scripture, when it comes to us with power as the word of God, is *the beginning of communion with God*. It will strike you in a moment that when the Lord speaks to a man, communion has in a measure begun. It may be that God speaks to a deaf ear, but even then it shows great goodness and condescension on God’s part that He should speak to men at all, and especially to those who refuse to hear

Him. But oh, if you actually hear the voice of God in His word, if it sinks into your soul by the accompanying power of the Holy Spirit, what remains then, but for you to answer the Lord and to let Him speak again? This Bible talks, “When you awake, it shall talk with you.” This is God’s side of a heavenly conversation, which ought to be kept up throughout all the days of our pilgrimage. God says this and that in the word, and we in prayer, in faith, in holy action reply to Him, and then He speaks again, and we answer Him again. When you are alone, and wish to have communion with God, you probably begin with prayer. Do so. But sometimes you feel that you cannot pray. Very well, do not try. Say, “I desire to converse with God, and if *I* cannot speak I will hear *Him* speak.” Get down the Bible. Read a Psalm, or some precious portion of Holy Writ, and after God has thus spoken to you, the conversation has begun. God’s words will suggest heart-words with which you can speak to the Most High. If it does not, read some more, till at last within your spirit there is communion with the Eternal One. Oh, what bliss it is that God does speak to any of us, to me, a poor, worthless, sinful creature! How highly favored is man to have a word from the great King! Many would give their eyes to be spoken to by a monarch, but here we are spoken to daily by the King of kings if we are but willing to incline our ear to His sweet voice. And this is the commencement of a communion which may continue throughout life and consummate itself in everlasting glory.

Personally I can sometimes realize my text in a peculiar sense, when the word of God becomes to me *the instrument of usefulness*. How often do I look around me anxiously for the next theme of discourse! My mind inquires, what shall I preach to the people? What shall be my message? With what shall I feed my church? This is a trying question after twenty-eight years preaching to one congregation. At last a passage comes

home to my soul with power. I have found it. What joy fills the preacher's heart! No warrior was ever gladder when he heaped up, the mountains of prey.

You meet with a person who is anxious, you want to say the right word to him, and therefore you prayerfully look all around, until a text suggests itself, which proves to be the exact word for the person who's good you are seeking. Have you not felt great joy in handling such a passage as the instrument of usefulness? Have you not been ready to cry like the old Greek philosopher, "I have found it, I have found it!"? Have you not wanted to be off to tell it not only to the one person you are anxious about, but to fifty thousand more? Ah, yes, you have rejoiced as one that finds great spoil.

You see then, that there is a distinct a joy which comes to the man who gets God's word into his soul—a joy which arises out of the fact that there is a word of God which comes to us as the revelation of God, as an infallible guide through life, as the pledge of divine mercy, the beginning of divine communion, and the instrument of usefulness. Upon all those things we might profitably enlarge, but time would not allow it, so I beg you to follow me to the next point. May the Holy Spirit lead our minds.

II. Secondly, let us remark that **FREQUENTLY THE JOY OF THE BELIEVER IN THE WORD ARISES OUT OF HIS HAVING HAD TO BATTLE TO OBTAIN A GRASP OF IT.** Read the text again, "I rejoice at Your word, as one that finds great spoil." Covered with sweat, dirty with dust, bleeding from many a wound, wearied and faint, the fighting man has smitten the enemy, and now he staggers forward to seize his portion of the prey, finding new strength in the joy of victory. Did you ever have to do that with God's word, for I have had to do many times; and I will try to describe the battle as I know it. "O my soul, you have trod down strength."

We have had to fight over certain *doctrines* before we could really come at them. Learning doctrines out of books, or merely learning them as matters of catechism, is never enough. Such teaching is all very useful and helpful, but the sure way to learn a doctrine is to have it burned into your soul as with a hot iron. “Oh,” they say of me, “that man speaks so dogmatically.” I cannot help it. Why should I speak with bated breath when I feel absolutely certain of what I say? If I were not certain, I would hold my tongue until I was. I could not dare to come here to talk of matters which may or may not be true. I dare not thus waste your time and thought. I have not only found the doctrines of the gospel in God’s word, but I have tested and tried them in my own experience, and they have been so powerfully operative upon my own soul that I must speak as I find. To me the things I preach are as assured as my existence. In fact, they are a part of my existence, since they are my life, my hope, my joy and strength. I am positive in speech because I am assured in mind. Nor can I see the gain which would accrue from the opposite style of speech. Of what avail is this cloudy doubt? Unless a man speaks up to the best of his knowledge and belief, most positively, who is likely to believe him? Wise men will bid the speaker make up his own mind before he can hope to influence other minds. I have no doubt about the existence of a God. Have you? If you have, do not set up to be a minister for God by any manner of means. I have no doubt about the mediatorial power of His precious blood. Have you? If you have, do not pretend to be a Christian teacher, for your whole weight will be on the wrong side. Faith receives more stabs from waverers than from avowed skeptics. Sowers of doubt are no friends to the gospel, for men are saved by faith, but nobody was ever saved by unbelief. “We know and have believed the love which God has towards us.” “I believed, therefore have I spoken.” But how do we get to this assurance?

Why, by fighting our way to it. A doctrine of God's word comes before us. Our heart exclaims, "Yes, this seems to be the teaching of Scripture, and therefore I must believe it." But carnal reason rebels, and conjures up an army of difficulties, while our proud human nature revolts from a truth which is so little to its taste. These things have to be battled with. Faith has to bring all the faculties of the children of God upon their knees, and to say to them, "Be quiet, listen while God speaks, let God be true and every man a liar, and every faculty in the man a liar too, sooner than God be distrusted." This is the victory we have to strive after, the triumph of a firm belief in the veracity of God. A doubt rises, then another and another, like a flight of bats when a dark cave is startled by the blaze of torches. Away they fly and light seizes on their dreary realm.

Some minds have for a time to contend with doubts, army after army. Do not wonder if you have to strive even to blood, till your very soul bleeds over the doctrine. But rejoice that when once you thus win it you will doubt no more, and the truth will become doubly precious to you ever afterwards. You have gained the truth by fighting for it, and therefore you cry, "This is my spoil, and none shall rob me of it." Take away the giant's head from David? He is not to be so defrauded. Did he not cut it off himself? Did he not throw the stone which sank into the Philistine's forehead? So when a man has slain a thousand doubts in conflict over a doctrine, and has at last come to assured belief, straightway he rejoices "as one that has found great spoil."

What a fight there is sometimes over a *promise*. Have you never entered into such a contest? O gracious promise, most suitable to my case! How it would comfort my soul! But may I appropriate it? The devil says, "Certainly not." He pushes us back from it. Our feeble hope assures us that it is too good to be true to us. A thousand doubtful suggestions assail us, till at

last the soul, by a desperate effort, seizes the portion and holds it against all comers. We drive out the Canaanites, though they have chariots of iron, and take possession of their strongholds. Then does a man rejoice over a promise when he has believed it in the teeth of a thousand improbabilities, and proved it to be true. He feels that he took the blessing out of the hand of the Amorite with his sword and with his bow, and from then on it is a peculiar portion to his soul, and he rejoices over it “as one that finds great spoil.” It is a good thing to mark your Bibles when you have received a promise. Mark the margin with T and P, and let it stand for “tried and proved.” Mark the passage which the Lord fulfils to you with some private seal, bearing witness to its truth. David set his own hand to the margin in many places, as for instance, when he exhorted us to wait on the Lord, and then added, “Wait, *I say*, on the Lord.” May that which is written with ink in the Bible be written with grace on our hearts. May the public promise become a private promise to each one of us by the living experience of our own soul.

Sometimes the hardest fight is round a *precept*. God has bid us do this and that, but carnal ease cries, “Let the precept alone,” and love of self says, “That command is too humbling, pass it by.” But oh, when you can battle with yourself and win the victory till your heart cries, “I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I have loved,” then your rejoicing will be great indeed! What a joy to conquer yourself! What bliss to master your surroundings, and all the peculiarities of your disposition and temperament, so as to come to love the same precept which a little while ago was irksome. How the believer loves the law when he has fought down his rebellious will, vanquished his obstinacy, crushed his pride, fettered his levity, and yielded himself wholly to the word of the Lord. Holy Spirit, give us this joy.

A sharp warfare often goes on over *the threats*. I have had many a wrestling match over them. A voice whispers in my ear, “that threat of God is too severe, that sentence of Scripture is too harsh.” Certain of my brethren carry a bit of pumice stone with them, and rub down the rough texts. Whenever they find God speaking in wrathful indignation against sinners, they meet His terrors with a “larger hope.” Things that are revealed belong to me, but things that are not revealed seem to belong to them. They have many learned ways of softening down disagreeable truth. Now, if I find my mind quarrelling with any line of Scripture, I say to my soul, “You are wrong, or else you would be in accord with every word of the Judge of all the earth.” If I cannot yield unfeigned assent, and consent to the justice of God, it does not occur to me to alter the Scripture, but to school my own heart till it bows before the thunder of divine judgment. I try to get my heart into such a state that I can say, “If my soul were in God’s place, this is exactly what I would say to the ungodly, this is precisely the measure I would deal out. For it must be right, it must be just or Jehovah would not so deal with men.” When you are thus agreed with God, you will rejoice as one that finds great spoil, for you will be confident that to the sternest problems there is a gracious answer, and for the direst difficulties a sweet solution. It is hazardous to take the soul out of texts of Scripture, and to attempt to give them souls of our own invention. Let us learn God’s meaning, and then become friends with it. Grow accustomed to the terrible texts till like Daniel, you feel safe even in the lions’ den. The doctrine of eternal punishment is no longer difficult for me to believe since I am confident that it is taught in the Scriptures. The difficulties of it are for God to solve, and there I leave them, being well assured that in some way or other, all that He does will be consistent with His justice

and His love. Not without a battle does one consent, unto the darker side of Sacred Writ, but that once fought there is rest.

Yet, once more, this is true about *the word which reveals Christ*. We know not Christ aright till we are conformed to what we know of Him. If Christ is lovely, we shall not understand that loveliness till we are in a measure lovely ourselves. The pure in heart see the pure and holy God because every man sees what he is. When the lady said to Mr. Turner, “Sir, I have seen that spot many times, but I never saw that which you have pictured,” “No, Ma’am,” he replied, “I dare say you have not. But don’t you wish you could?” Just so, the artist’s eye sees what another eye cannot, and the pure in heart see in God what nobody else can see, because they are like God. When our minds become molded like the mind of Christ, then we understand Christ. If there is anything about the character of our divine exemplar which staggers us, let us pray our way into it. We must get to be like Him, and oh, when we do, then every line of that dear face will be conspicuously and transcendently charming to us, because we have come to it through suffering.

The inner experience of many a child of God lies much in conflict and contention, and scarcely an inch of Scripture is truly gained without fighting for it foot to foot with those who would rob us of our inheritance. Canaan was given to Israel by the Lord Himself, by a covenant of salt, but we all remember the long list of enemies that already occupied it. What is the name of them? Hivites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites—I will not trouble you with more, so many and so ugly are the names of those who would keep back the believer from his portion in the covenant. One of old said, “They compassed me about like bees: like bees they compassed me about” and yet he added, “But in the name of the Lord will I destroy them.” May it be our resolve that we will take every part of the word to be our heritage, and rejoice over it “as one that finds great spoil.”

III. We shall now tarry a moment upon a third thought, which is altogether different from that which has gone before. **AT TIMES THE JOY OF THE BELIEVER, LIES IN ENJOYING, GOD’S WORD, WITHOUT ANY FIGHTING AT ALL.** In the text I am not sure that fighting is certainly mentioned or necessarily implied, though it is highly probable. David says, “I rejoice at Your word, as one that *finds* great spoil,” as if he fell upon it all of a sudden, like the lepers at the gate of Samaria, who to their surprise, found all the way they traversed covered with garments, and gold and silver vessels. They had not lifted a finger in war, yet they found great spoil, like the man in the parable who, when he was plowing, found a treasure hidden in the field. He had never looked for it, but he had great joy in discovering it. In infinite mercy the Lord makes His word open up before His people when they are not seeking it, according to the promise, “I am found of them that sought Me not.” Have you ever experienced what this means, and have you not rejoiced as one that suddenly finds spoil?

The word of the Lord is often, as spoil *found*, not fought for. The promise lies before me on the way, and I find it, and by the law of the kingdom of grace it becomes mine for the finding. There it is, and the Spirit of God reveals it to me, and I take it, asking no leave whatever, since all covenant blessings are free to us when we are free to take them. Our guarantee for feeding at the banquet of love is the fact that God has set before us an open door, and we are invited to enter in. What joy is this!

This spoil, however, must have cost somebody else most dear, though it has cost us nothing. If *we* did not fight for it, somebody else fought for it once. Ah, what a fight was that! Let Gethsemane and Calvary tell. What joy there is in seizing the spoil which Jesus has left us as the result of His life’s warfare! We have not trod the winepress, but yet we drink the

wine. The blessing is free to us, but it cost Him groans and tears, and bloody sweat, and death. “This is David’s spoil.” Look down and see the mark of the victor’s feet! See you not where the nails went in? The Crucified One has been here and smitten all our adversaries, and left this spoil for us poor creatures to divide among ourselves.

Great is the spoil, all the spoils of death and hell, all that father Adam was robbed of is recovered from the robbers. Life, light, peace, joy, holiness, immortality, heaven—all these are brought back by our great Conqueror who has taken the prey from the mighty, and brought back the lawful captives, leading captivity captive. O, brethren, we do rejoice when we get a hold of the precious treasures of the word as Jesus Christ’s spoil, fought for by Himself, and then distributed to us.

What a joy there is in our heart when we remember what foes our Lord overcame to gain all this spoil for us. Sin has been routed, death has been slain, and hell has been stripped of its prey, our direst enemies are broken in pieces, and the crown of their head is crushed by Him who is the seed of the woman, the Messiah of God.

Whenever a passage of Scripture sings to you of itself, sing with it before the Lord. Whenever in reading, the verse seems to leap out of the page into your bosom, there let it lodge forever. Whenever in hearing the word it darts into your heart, then you will understand what David meant when he said that his soul rejoiced over God’s word “as one who,” by a happy, blessed find, “finds great spoil.”

IV. My fourth head is the principal one, and I want all your attention while I dwell on it for a short time. **THERE IS A JOY ARISING OUT OF THE VERY FACT THAT HOLY SCRIPTURE MAY BE CONSIDERED TO BE A SPOIL.** I will show you that in five particulars.

First, a spoil is the *end of the uncertainty*. Whenever a fight begins, it is questionable who will win. While it rages the result still hangs quivering in the balances, but we know who has won the battle when the victor begins to divide the spoil. No question now remains, the debate is ended. Blessed is that man who has found in Scripture a spoil in the sense that he has come to the end of uncertainty, and arrived at something like certainty. All men that think crave after certainty, and gradually settle down to one standard or another. I have heard of two brothers, equally honest and thoughtful men, who commenced life at the same point, but parted in their search after a foundation firm and strong. One of them at last gravitated to the Church of Rome, for he thought he discovered certainty in an historical church, and in one at the head of it whose utterances are regarded as infallible. I do not envy him his ideal certainty; it seems to me to be a mass of fraud, a great historical imposture. The other brother found his resting place in his own reason, or in the fact that he could not be sure of anything. There is a certainty in being certain that you are not certain of anything, but certainly it is not a certainty which would afford comfort to me, for my reason would be to me a sorry guide for eternal things, since even in everyday concerns it has misled me. We must find certainty somewhere, or believe that we have found it, or else we shall be of all men most miserable.

If a man has no standard of infallibility outside, he tries to find it in himself, and becomes his own pope, and depend upon it, a pope in England is as likely to err as a pope in Rome. I would not give two pence for the two of you, and if I threw myself in, it would not add an extra farthing to the value. When a man has in experience fought up to confidence in the word of the Lord, or has had it effectually laid home by the Holy Spirit to his own soul, then he reaches the end of the controversy so far as he himself is concerned. He is dividing

the spoil, for he says, “We have known and believed the love which God has towards us.” Of course, people come round and say, “You are mistaken.” Our answer is, “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. It may not be certainty to you, but it is to me.” If a man should assert, “Oh, that medicine is all quackery,” he has a right to speak his mind, but his decision is not final. “Not so,” cries another, “I have been ill half-a-dozen times, and on each occasion I have speedily recovered through its use. Call it quackery if you like; it is no quackery to me at any rate, for I am certain about its good effects.” So is it when a man has at last, by the application of the Spirit of God, felt the power of God’s word over his soul, he says, “I am not going to fight that battle over again. I am sure of the truth of that Scripture.” Such a man is restful about that matter. I would to God that all of you had this certainty as some of us have. How horrible it is to grope in the eternal fog, to flounder in primeval chaos, seeing no road or landmark, turning this way and finding it night, and the other way equally darkness; to the right disorder, to the left questions. Oh, to get to know that God loves me, and that I love God, and that Christ has redeemed me, and my sin is put away, and to feel all this witnessed in my soul by the Holy Spirit! This is to rejoice in the end of uncertainty as one that divides the spoil.

The next idea that comes out of the figure of spoil is this. *It is the weakening of the adversary for any future attacks*, for when they divide the spoil they say to one another, “The invaders will be here again, no doubt, before long, but they will not have this great gun to turn upon us, we have spiked it. Their stock of ammunition will be somewhat diminished by the capture of their magazine, and they will not have this huge chest of gold with which to purchase more martial equipment, for we have taken it from them. We have weakened the adversary. Have we not entered their strongholds? Have we not captured their

quadrilateral? They may again take up arms, but their force is broken.” Every doubt a man conquers by resting on the infallible word, has weakened the power of unbelief within him, and strengthened his faith. Blessed is that man who has so trusted in his God that doubts are now but as the grasshopper which is only a burden to the feeble. O the joy of saying, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him.” Or to cry with the once-blind man, “One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see.” Tasting and handling of the good things of the kingdom, we rise into a region of fact, and leave suppositions and quibbles far below. In this lies a part of the joy of taking the spoil, we hope for less disturbance of heart, less peril of intellect, less struggle of soul from this time forth. The horns of the adversary have been broken, and they cannot harm us as before.

Next, in dividing the spoil there is always *a sense of victory*, and so there is in believing God’s word. In getting firm hold upon the faithful testimony of our God, we achieve a conquest over doubts, fears, disquietudes, and all our proud judgments of God. There is a sense of conquest when we overcome our passions and propensities, and do the Lord’s bidding according to His precepts and statutes. When that which at one time was difficult, if not impossible, becomes easy and delightful, then we wave the palm branch over a defeated enemy. When the mind is brought into subjection to all and every revealed truth, we have done more than if we had taken a strong city. “This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.” May we have more of it, and go from strength to strength, doing valiantly in the name of the Lord.

Again, in dividing the spoil there is *profit, pleasure, and honor*. I am not about to justify the deeds of war, for these I hate, as to plunder and pillage, such as have been indulged in by the

general run of conquerors, they are detestable crimes. Men have made themselves worse than devils to men. No calamities have ever befallen nations that are so much to be deplored as the atrocities of war. I use the warlike metaphor, but condemn the fact. Men conceive when they divide the spoil, that there is honor in it. Look at the crowds that gathered along the *Via Sacra* when the Roman conquerors came down from the Apian Way, passed under the arch, and marched towards the Capitol. Then did the populace crowd the house roofs, and the chimney tops, that they might see a Scipio or a Caesar expose his captives and display his spoils. They shouted till they were hoarse, and wearied themselves with applause at the sight of the *spolia opima* which were borne in the procession. Thus men judge of plunder in war. See how Napoleon thought to glorify himself by placing in Paris the works of art which he had taken from the capitals of Europe. What are most trophies but stolen goods, or that which is purchased by them? But when you and I lay hold of Holy Scripture, then have we grasped a prey more precious than royal treasures, a prey which we may hold with justice and honor. When we can say that the things which God has revealed are ours, then we are rich beyond a miser's dream, and when we can hold them against all comers, then that which we believe becomes our honor and gives glory to us, and glory to faith, and chief glory to Him who worked our faith in us by His almighty Spirit.

Last of all, the spoil is *a prophecy of rest*, and so is that delightful dividing up of the word of God, and the appropriation thereof by faith. "Ah," said the Romans when they spoiled old Carthage, "we shall never see another Hannibal at our gates, nor dread the ships of Carthage in our seas." They had overcome their most potent adversary when they utterly spoiled her, and then they looked for a long period of peace. And that is the joy of receiving the word. When we

can believe that Jesus took our sins, and suffered for them on the tree, we are no more troubled as to the guilt of sin. When we believe that our heavenly Father overrules all things for the good of His people, then sorrow and sighing, fear and fretting flee away. Well may he rest who sees even evil made to work for his good. When we believe that Jesus died and rose again from the dead, then the fear of death which haunts so many receives its mortal wound. Knowing the meaning of the word, “He that believes in Me, though he were dead yet shall he live,” the dread of death has no more dominion over us.

The appropriation of the divine promise, as the soldier appropriates his share of the booty, is to us the prophecy that the war is over. We may rest now, and be quiet. And oh, what joy, what blessedness is this! How I would that all those who are here present were believers, first in Jesus the great incarnate Word, and then in this book, the written word, and that you did not only believe these things to be true, but took them to yourselves as warriors take the spoil. Happy and blessed would you be, and your rejoicing this day, would be as the joy of harvest, or as the shouting of them that divide the spoil. God grant it may be so, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

1642 VERILY, VERILY – JOHN 5:24

A Sermon

Delivered on Sunday Morning, January 29, 1882,

by the

REV. C. H. SPURGEON

At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that hears My word, and believes on Him that sent Me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”
— John 5:24

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believes on Me has everlasting life.” — John 6:47

[Scripture Read before Sermon – John 5]

THE WORDS “VERILY, VERILY,” as they were solemnly used by our divine Lord, indicate an utterance of special importance. If Jesus says, “Verily, verily,” there is something coming to which we should attend with all our hearts. The subject which He thus introduces is our possession of eternal life, and our being delivered from condemnation by faith in Himself. Can any theme be more important? Many questions may be asked, but they can all afford to wait till we get the answer to that first inquiry, “What must I do to be saved?” What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world of knowledge and knows not the way of life? If he wins a world in this life what will that benefit him if he misses life everlasting? It is very considerate on our Lord’s part to call us with such

great solemnity to think about our souls and eternal life. Let us attend to His appeal. Come here, dear hearer, and bend over the words which Jesus commends to you with a double *NOTA BENE*, saying, “Verily, verily.”

Our Lord used this, “Verily, verily,” to denote a clear and certain revelation. There must be an end to all doubt when Jesus says, “Verily, verily.” His ordinary word is true, for nothing but truth can come from Him who is “the Truth,” but when He uses His strongest declaration, “Verily, verily,” then we must regard the statement with special reverence if we are indeed His loyal subjects. When Jesus says, “Verily, verily,” we see two armies of truth gathered around His royal standard. His declaration is to be accepted as indisputable, immutable, infallible truth. Do you not agree to this?

Carefully notice where this certainty lies, it rests solely upon the word of Jesus—“I say unto you.” In the matter of our salvation, carnal reason never arrives at certainty. Mere argument can never bring a troubled heart to a sure anchorage. The certainty which Christ sets before us rests upon His own solemn assertion. Instead of proof, the incarnate Son of God gives us—“Verily, verily, I say unto you.” If you are His disciples indeed, and would enjoy the benefits of His salvation, you must accept your Lord’s statement without question. Doubts and reasonings must lie down at His feet, and it must be enough that Jesus says it. The *ipse dixit* of a mere man is not enough, but those of us who adore the Lord Jesus as the Son of God desire no better assurance than the word of His lips. Here is our ultimate ground of faith, our main argument with mankind, our final answer to Satan, and the eternal quietus of every misgiving—*Jesus says it*. We shall never arrive at certainty as to everlasting life except by a conviction that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is infallible in everything that He says. I had rather have one word from Jesus than volumes of human

reasonings, however conclusive they may appear. Our judgment has often deceived us, even our senses play us false, and our emotions are no more to be depended on than the winds and waves, but here is a rocky foundation, firm as the pillars of heaven—"Verily, verily, I say unto you."

It is clear that the teaching of this present verse must be accepted by all Christians. They must either believe it or reject their Lord, for He does, as it were, stake His own character for truth upon this utterance by prefacing it with, "I say unto you." Jesus does not leave the way of life a moot point, but decides it with all authority, states it in plain terms, and sets it forth formally, in a declaration for which He will be forever responsible. If you reject this teaching, you must reject the Teacher Himself. Nothing of authority remains to Jesus if you take liberty to question this point, for He does not put it as a matter of report, or inference, but as a truth to be accepted on His own authority, "Verily, verily, I say unto you."

I have heard some who call themselves Christians talk about the doctrine of salvation through faith in Christ as if it were a mere theory of what they are pleased to call the Evangelical School, but is it so? Is it not our Lord's own teaching? Our opponents have full liberty to canvass the peculiar tenets of a party, and the more they do so the better, but this teaching is not ours, it is the teaching of Him whom these critics call Master and Lord. Is this their reverence for the Son of God? Do they challenge Him to His face, and question that which He asserts with a double verily, and certifies by the dignity of His person and the veracity of His character?

I am equally at issue with those who admit the doctrine of justification by faith and then add that it is to be guardedly stated and cautiously presented. Does Jesus teach dangerous doctrine? This truth is constantly assailed by the carnally wise, but is that a reason for mistrusting it when Jesus puts it forward

in such a form? Understand clearly that if you reject the doctrine of life through believing, you reject the authority of Jesus. It is useless to talk about being a Christian if you are not prepared to believe what Jesus Christ asserts, for one of the first requisites for a true disciple is faith in his Master. What kind of follower can he be who takes liberty to question when his Master stands erect in all the dignity of His glorious perfection and cries, “Verily, verily, I say unto you”? Are any of you such hypocrites as to call yourselves Christians and give Christ the lie? Dare you treat Him as if He were one of yourselves, to be disputed with and criticized at pleasure? This is not reverence, but rejection—I might justly call it blasphemy.

Note well the verse which precedes the text, “That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honors not the Son honors not the Father which has sent Him.” On the heels of that claim comes this assertion of everlasting life through hearing His word and believing on Him that sent Him, as much as to say, “Believe what I am now about to say, even as if the Father spoke, for implicit faith is due to Me. If you would honor Me, believe in Me, but if you refuse what I say, you do Me the greatest dishonor.” Jesus regards this point as being so vital that He pledges His own character for veracity as a guarantee for the doctrine. He does as good as say, “If you would honor Me, believe this truth which I now declare upon My own authority.”

I feel this morning great restfulness of heart as to what I have to say. I shall not speak at haphazard upon a matter of opinion, speculation, or probability, nor shall I beg your consent and agreement to it as a matter of favor. I stand fair and square before you, and I demand the assent of all who profess and call themselves Christians upon a point which Jesus has set at rest forever by the solemn declaration, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believes in Me has everlasting life.” Such

as are prepared to reject the authority of the Lord Jesus may do so, to them I have no word this morning. But to all such as acknowledge His Messiahship and Deity, I present the doctrine of the text as worthy of all acceptance. May the Holy Spirit help me to set it out with clearness, and enable you to receive it into your inmost souls.

Our Savior is speaking of a great blessing, and our first head is *the person to whom this blessing comes*—"He that hears My word and believes on Him that sent Me has everlasting life." We shall speak, secondly, upon *the blessing itself*—"He has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." And thirdly, and this will be the point I shall lay most stress upon, *the singular assurance with which it is stated*, the wonderful firmness and distinctness with which it is asserted by the Master, and backed up with, "Verily, verily, I say unto you."

I. First, then, THE PERSON TO WHOM THIS BLESSING COMES. Read the passage, and you notice, first, that the privileged individual is *a hearer who is also a believer*. "He that hears My word, and believes on Him that sent Me, has everlasting life." It does not appear from our text, that everlasting life is communicated by drops of water, or in any other ceremonial manner, the command is, "Hear and your soul shall live." Men are not expected to believe that which they have never heard. They are not to take the articles of the church rolled up, as it were, into a pill, silver-coated, and to swallow them, be they what they may, without instruction. We are to act towards saving truth as we do in reference to other information, we are to hear it with attention, and so receive it. Those who find everlasting life, first hear of Jesus, His mission, His person, His work, His sufferings, His offices, His power, and the blessings He has come to communicate. Listening to all this, they are grateful for being permitted to hear things which kings and

prophets desired to hear but heard not. Do not expect that you can be saved if you shut your ears to the gospel. Do not reckon that the same blessing will come to you if you carelessly walk the streets on the Sabbath as might come to you if you were diligent in listening to the word of the Redeemer. Hear what the Lord says, and let your whole heart yield itself to the truth.

But these people, while they are hearers to begin with, do not stop there, they become believers. They believe that Jesus is the appointed Savior, and they accept Him as such for themselves. They believe that His blood cleanses men from sin, and therefore they trust in His blood to cleanse them, and are cleansed by it. Since His righteousness justifies, they are glad to accept that righteousness, and so to be justified. Theirs is not a dreamy, inactive hearing, but when they know the truth, they practice what they know. They not only know that the brazen serpent will heal, but they look to it and are healed. I am talking to some of the best hearers in the world, and yet I fear that many of you come short, because you are hearers only, and not doers of that word which says, “Believe and live.”

Note again, these favored persons are *believers who remain hearers in the fullest sense*. These persons believe in God who has sent the Lord Jesus into the world, and consequently they believe that what Jesus says must be true, and then they hear His voice with a discerning, spiritual ear. Our Lord uses the word “hear” in a special sense when He says, “My sheep hear My voice.” They hear their Shepherd, but they know not the voice of strangers. “Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound. They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Your countenance.” Believers are taught of the Lord to perceive the difference between truth and error, between the teachings of mere legalists and the voice of the gospel of grace. Of others it is said, “their ears are dull of hearing,” but upon these a miracle of grace has been worked, so that they hear the voice of the

Son of God. Dear friend, is this your case? Is the name of Jesus sweet to you? Is a promise pronounced by His voice most comforting to your soul? Then be of good cheer, for you have everlasting life and come not under condemnation. You are resting upon the faithful promise of the Father, brought to you by the word of His own Son, and because of this you are quickened and justified. Jesus declares it is so. Do not doubt Him, lest you do despite to that blessed “Verily, verily” with which He prefaces the word.

The quickened ones are described in our second text as *believers in the Lord Jesus*. “He that believes in Me has everlasting life.” They have a personal faith in a personal Savior. They believe that God must punish sin, that God has punished sin in the person of Jesus, and that He has therefore set forth His Son Jesus Christ to be a propitiation for sin, that “whoever believes in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life.” This they believe, and on this they lean the full weight of their souls. Jesus says, “Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” and they come to Him for rest and receive rest. This is the main point in the character of those who have everlasting life, they are not here said to do anything, or achieve anything, but they believe in Jesus the Christ.

The saved are also described as *believers in Jesus because of the witness of the Father*. “He that hears My word, and believes on Him that sent Me.” Why do I believe that Jesus Christ is my Savior? Because the Father has sent Him, and borne witness to Him; I am sure that He can save me, for He is divinely commissioned, divinely furnished, and the pleasure of the Lord must prosper in His hands. I believe today that He who came to the waters of Jordan to be baptized was the Son of God, for the Father said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” I believe that He who went up to the mountain, and

was transfigured in the presence of His three disciples, was the Son of God, for once again the Father said in an audible voice, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear you Him.” I believe that Jesus Christ can save me, for when He prayed a voice was heard from heaven bearing witness that He was heard of the Father. The people that stood by knew not the meaning, but said that it thundered, yet there were some that heard that voice, and knew it to be the witness of the Lord. Those who have everlasting life believe in Jesus as the Christ of God, because the Father has given witness to Him in many ways—by an audible voice, by miracles, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and by constantly fulfilling in the ministry of Christ’s word the promises which He made unto us in connection therewith. This faith in God our Father and in our Lord Jesus Christ saves the soul.

But notice that our Lord has spoken these words of *every such believer*, “He that hears My word, and believes on Him that sent Me, has everlasting life.” Whatever else he may have or may not have, this is the vital point. “But, Lord, he is full of fault and imperfection.” There is no exception made on that ground, for “by Him all that believe are justified from all things.” “But the believing man makes many mistakes in points of theology.” Nothing is said in the text as to errors upon other points, but the text positively says, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that hears My word, and believes on Him that sent Me, has everlasting life.” If there is genuine faith in Jesus, there will be a sincere desire to understand all His teachings, and a readiness to believe them. But as for ignorance and mistakes, they are covered with all our other sins by the great atonement which is received by faith. “But, Lord, he is himself afraid that he has not attained to everlasting life. He trembles lest he should be found lacking when put into the balances.” No exception is made on account of timidity and diffidence. If any

man believes in Christ Jesus, the statement is made absolutely of him and of everyone like him, that he “has everlasting life.” Old or young, rich or poor, learned or illiterate, talented or obscure, there is no difference, all believers have everlasting life.

But, mark you, *there is no statement made as to the salvation of any other sort of person.* Nothing is said about the baptized person who is not a believer. He has been made a member of Christ, an heir of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven in baptism, according to the Prayer book, but is it true? Our text says nothing about the baptized, confirmed, and sacramental unbeliever having everlasting life. There is not a word that says it from Genesis to Revelation. Other books may say what they will, but this Book of God makes no account of any man who is devoid of faith. Did you tell me that such a one has been a professor of religion for many years, and his outward life has been most commendable? So far, so good, but that is not all. Indeed, it is beside the mark as to the teaching now before us, for the text says absolutely nothing about outward morality and correctness of conduct. These things are sure to be found where faith is found, but alone and by themselves, they answer not to the qualification laid down by our Lord. If a man believes not on Christ there is no cheering word for him, be he what he may. No one is left without eternal life that believes in Jesus, and no unbeliever is blessed with that life. What says the Scriptures? “He that believes on the Son has everlasting life: and he that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him.”

We now know the persons to whom the blessings of salvation have come. I hope that many of us are numbered with them.

II. Very briefly let us notice THE BLESSINGS WHICH BELONG TO BELIEVING.

First, our Lord asserts that the believer *“has everlasting life.”* He was condemned to die, and reckoned as a dead man, but he is now acquitted, and his life is granted him. He was spiritually dead, but the fact that he believes in Jesus is sufficient evidence that he has received spiritual life. John tells us in his epistle, “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that you may know that you have eternal life.” This spiritual life is not a thing of time only; it is expressly called “everlasting.” Those who in these days make out that, “everlasting” does not mean unending, will, I dare say, squeeze the life-blood out of our text. But the most of us take the word to mean what it says, and to signify life which will never end. If I have received life in Jesus Christ, I have received a life which will endure as long as the everlasting covenant, as long as everlasting love, as long as the everlasting God. According to a certain theology, a man may have life in Christ one day and lose it the next, how, then, is it everlasting life? If a man has lost his life, that life could not have been everlasting, that is clear. That which comes to an end could not have been everlasting. But we teach with the authority of Christ that the man that believes on Christ has at this moment within him a life that can never expire. The man may die after the flesh, but he can never die after the Spirit. There is for him no second death possible, unless the Bible expression is a mere trifling with language. The believer has within him a life which is derived from Christ Himself—“I in them,” and this life depends upon the life of Christ, even as He has put it, “Because I live, you shall live also.” The believer has this everlasting life now, for it is not said, “Shall have,” but “has everlasting life.” What a gift this is! To be born in the image of God, to be a partaker of His nature, to be placed beyond all reach of the second death. Glory be to God for this!

Notice, next, that the believer is in a condition of *non-condemnation*. He “shall not come into condemnation.” The translation would be more accurate if it were put, “and comes not into judgment,” that is to say, as soon as a man has believed in Christ he receives the benefit of Christ’s substitution, and is no longer under judgment, much less condemnation. In Christ the believer has been judged, condemned, and punished, and the believer is therefore clear of the law and all its penalties. If we have by our Surety answered all the demands of justice, what has the law to do with us? How can it bring us into judgment? How can it cause us to know condemnation? But will not the righteous be present in the judgment of the last day? Undoubtedly we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, but the judgment of that day will not be a judgment to us in the dreadful sense of the term. When a man is perfectly clear, and called into court on purpose to be publicly acquitted, it is no judgment to him. “The Lord shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people,” and this is our joy, that “our God shall come and shall not keep silent.” It will be no penalty, but a great delight, to stand before the great King and hear Him say, “Come, you blessed of My Father, enter the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

Our text has another sentence of privilege—he “*has passed from death unto life*.” Notice where judgment is. Look, here is death! Yonder is life and resurrection! Judgment, as it were, stands between the two. We have passed from death to life, and so we have passed by the judgment. There is a doctrinal error which cannot be too much condemned, that the resurrection is already past, but there is a blessed spiritual truth that cannot be too firmly grasped, that believers are already the children of the resurrection by having received quickening as to their spirits. In regeneration lies the essence and major portion of

resurrection. We have already passed from the kingdom of death into the kingdom of life, and so have passed by the judgment, since Jesus was judged for us, condemned for us, and made to die in our place. Abraham was called a Hebrew, or passer-over, and we, too, are Hebrews, having passed from one kingdom to another, being delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, and through Him we live. If Christ has suffered in our place we cannot suffer for sin, justice demands that we go free. What a miracle of mercy is this, that everyone that has believed in Jesus has left death behind him, never to return to it, has entered the realm of life, never to be banished from it, and has on the road passed under the rod of judgment and the sword of condemnation, so that neither of these can further afflict him in time or in eternity.

Did I hear someone object, "You make too much of so small a matter as believing. You make out that simply by trusting in Jesus Christ there is a difference made between one man and another of a most extraordinary kind and that it is made at once"? Yes, I do say that, exactly that, and as far as I am concerned, I do not care how much you quarrel with it, I shall not tone down the statement. "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned."

I hear you mutter, "I think you are very uncharitable." Say so, if you please, I shall prove my charitableness by bearing it. But look! Here is a person standing right in the middle of a railway track, and I say to him, "My dear fellow, if you do not come off that track you will be smashed to atoms within the next five minutes, for an express train is thundering along the line." He laughs and answers, "Do you mean to say that my shifting the position of my body a couple of feet will make all that difference? Do you tell me that if I move I shall be safe,

and that if I stand here I shall be cut to pieces?” “Yes, I do say it, and say it with tears, begging you to believe me, and get off the track.” “Then,” he says, “you are very uncharitable.” “Yes,” I reply, “and you are very insane.” What more can I say? It is never uncharitable to speak the truth for the good of the person concerned. A small matter may suffice to shape the destiny of an immortal soul. In those ill times, when there were slaves across the Atlantic, a lady went down to one of our ships, accompanied by her Negro servant. The lady remarked to the captain that if she was to go to England and take this black woman with her, she would become free as soon as she landed. The captain replied, “Madam, she is free already. The moment she came on board a British vessel she was free.” When the Negro woman knew this, do you think she went on shore with her mistress? By no means, she chose to keep her liberty. But what made her rise from a slave to a free woman? Why, only a few inches of separation from the shore. I do not know how far the ship was from land, the distance may have been very little, still it made all the difference, she was free on board, and a slave on land. How slight the change of place, but how great the difference involved. Marvel not that faith involves such great things.

I heard a grumbler say, “We do not want this doctrine. What we need is more morality and honesty.” Just so. You remind me of a poor little child. His father planted bulbs to come up in the spring, and make the garden gay with golden flowers. But the boy said, “We don’t want bulbs; we want crocus cups and daffodils.” The child forgot that flowers never grow without roots. You, too, good sir, forget that holy lives cannot grow without a cause, and faith is the root of virtue. Flowers stuck into the ground without roots are babes’ follies, and good works without faith are childish vanities. We preach faith in order that good works may follow, and they do follow,

and are the fruits of that eternal life which men receive by faith. Are you not willing to get the flowers through the roots? Go, silly children, and grow wiser.

III. I close with my last head, which is **THE ASSURANCE WITH WHICH THIS DOCTRINE IS STATED** in my text. It was that which attracted me to it.

First, the doctrine of this text is certified to us by the terms in which our Lord utters it. I have already told you this, but I mean to go over it again. Our Lord Jesus, whose name is Faithful and True, here pledges His honor as God, His veracity as man, upon the certainty of this doctrine. He says, “Verily, verily.” These two words sound to me like great guns leveled against unbelief. Like the two brazen pillars called Joachim and Boaz, these two verities stand in the porch of mercy’s temple, and show us where there is establishment and strength in the word of the Son of man.

Our Lord then adds, “I say unto you.” Then it must be so, or else the Lord speaks in error, and none think that for a moment, for He is Wisdom itself. Is He not the only wise God, our Savior? Do you dream that these words may mean less than they say? That would be to charge the Lord with insincerity, mocking poor souls with great words and small meanings. No, you would count it profane to imagine such a thing. “He that believes in Me has everlasting life” must, then, mean what it says. Christ knows what is everlasting life and who has it, for there is no eye like His that can discern life, wherever it may be, and discriminate between the false and the true. Others might be mistaken and deceived, but Christ knows what is the true life, being Himself, the living and true God. Jesus also knows whether we shall be judged and condemned or not, for He is Himself the Judge. The Father has committed all judgment unto the Son, and if the Judge Himself says that we shall never come into condemnation, we can have no cause for fear. Who

is he that condemns? Christ that died, who sits at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us? Impossible!

Our Lord Jesus also knows the future; it is before Him as if it were present. He foresees everything that can possibly happen, and so if He testifies of the believer, “he shall never come into condemnation,” then depend upon it, the fact is sure. If a prophet speaks you believe him—shall you not much more believe the Son of God? The believer has everlasting life; it is true, it is most surely true.

The question may be raised, why does our Lord need to put it so very, very positively? Did I hear any of you grumbling in your hearts just now, at my going over the same ground? I did it on purpose, because it is with such great difficulty that you can get men to accept this humbling truth. Human nature revolts against it. As for the unconverted, even when they begin to feel their need of a Savior they cannot think it true that by believing in Jesus Christ they will pass from death to life. Salvation must be by faith that it may be of grace, and it must be of grace or not at all. But proud souls will not have it so. A man must be driven to self-despair before he will agree to be saved by faith in Christ. You who deal much with souls know how they try to escape their own mercy and avoid the loving-kindness of the Lord. Even you that have believed and are saved are not half as sure as you ought to be. Are there not times with you when you say, “I do not feel as I wish, and therefore I am not saved”? What argument is there in that? Can your feelings make Christ a liar? Remember the evidence of your being saved, as a believer lies wholly in that “I say unto you.” Perhaps you are not sure that you have everlasting life, and yet you are sure that you are a believer in Jesus. How is this? This is questioning Christ’s veracity. His strongest affirmation is, “Verily, verily.” Is He not to be believed on this? You, as His dear disciple, lover, and friend, would be very indignant if

anyone cast a suspicion upon His truthfulness—why will you do it yourself? Accept the truth heartily. Never doubt it, but let it stand as a fact most sure and steadfast that your faith has saved you.

It is, then, if you are a believer, absolutely certain that you shall never be condemned, but have passed from death unto life, the Lord puts it so positively that we may be right positive about it. Why are you not, as a believer, absolutely certain of yours possession of eternal life? The Master, who knew our unbelief, has put the matter so straight and plain that nobody can get over it without rejecting His word. It is certain that he that believes in Him has everlasting life, certain, then, that we are saved if we are believers. We need not be afraid to believe this with great confidence, and to rejoice because of it. Someone says, “Ah, but it might be presumption.” Presumption to believe that Jesus speaks the truth! I will tell you what is presumption, and that is, to question anything that our Lord has said. Is He your Master and Lord? If He is not, say so, but if He is, will you venture to sit upon the throne and judge the sayings of yours own Lord, and say, “This may be true and that may be false”?

Another objector cries, “But I think a person may be too certain.” A person may be a great deal too certain if the argument is based upon inference. But if a statement is based upon the personal testimony of the Lord Jesus, we cannot be too certain of it. Circumstantial evidence is often very powerful, and to some minds irresistible. Yet the inference drawn from it may be false. But the witness of a person who cannot err is worth all the circumstantial evidence in the world. Jesus Christ cannot be suspected of falsehood or error, either in His divine character or in His perfect human character, and therefore the basis of our confidence cannot be shaken. Our rest must be found entirely in that grand word, “I say unto you.” The weight

of your doubt, if you have any, must fall upon His personal character and there also the stress of yours faith must be fixed. If Jesus speaks the truth, then the believer has everlasting life. If the believer questions whether he has life or not, he questions the veracity of Christ. We are bound by our discipleship to be at rest. Happiness becomes a duty, and peace a matter of obligation. Happy men, who are under bonds to be joyful! We are partakers of eternal life, we come not into condemnation. What delight, what peace flows through our spirits. If it is indeed so that we have commenced the same life which is to be developed in eternal glory, then what gratitude ought to fill us, and how that gratitude should urge us to holiness, and to perfect obedience to Him who has given us this inestimable blessing! Come let us not play with these things, but act as it behooves us to act, seeing that these things are indeed so. If they were mere myths or dreams we might treat them carelessly, but accepting them as true, let us feel the force of their truth, and let us rejoice this day in Him who has called us with so high a calling.

One thing I want you to notice, and that is that our Lord does not desire us to keep this doctrine in the background. This doctrine that “whoever believes in Him has everlasting life,” is not for our own private comfort alone, it is to be proclaimed upon our housetops. Those Jews in Christ’s day were a company of cross-grained fault-finders, who picked holes in Him about everything and nothing. Very harpies were they, full of spite at His excellence. They had just been finding fault with His healing a man on the Sabbath, and He had answered them out straight without reserve. And when He had their ear, He told them a truth which would cut them to the quick. It was not a wanton casting of pearls before swine, and yet they were not worthy to hear so divine a truth. Jesus tells it to them that we may tell it to all. Never let us conceal what Jesus thus

unveiled. There stands the precious Master, and He says, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, you quarrelsome Jews, whose groveling minds cannot comprehend Me, that he that believes in Me has everlasting life. Your hands even now are near the ground seeking for stones to hurl at Me, but I say it to you, as a thing I mean you to know, even if you gnash your teeth over it, that he that believes in Me has everlasting life.” Oh brothers and sisters, let that be our answer to the present critical age. Let us turn the bulls-eye of our lantern full in its face. Let us cry again and again, “Believe in Jesus and live.” They will reply to you with philosophical deduction and learned quibble, and they will dig all sorts of pits for you, hoping to entrap you. Never mind their pits, or their quibbles, or their deductions, but just go on telling out the truth that “whoever believes in Jesus has everlasting life.”

But why tell it to these Jews that were so angry with Him? Perhaps some of them would be converted by it. Tell it to all men with this view, for the gospel often begets faith in violent opposers. But if they were not converted they would be left without excuse, and this is something. Whatever may come of it, this truth is meant to be written across the brow of heaven. It is to be published throughout all nations, that all may know it. One of our ministers, years ago, traveling by coach, asked an erroneous preacher who was on the same coach this question—“How is a sinner justified in the sight of God?” This gentleman replied, “Ah, I know you. If I were to let you know my views, you would put them in your sermon and spread them all over England.” “Ah,” cried our friend, “you are ashamed of yours notions, are you? Well, I will give you the answer, and I will be very glad if you will put it in all your lectures and publish it the entire world over—man is justified in the sight of God by faith in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ.” Our doctrine is not special truth for the elite and initiated, to be

dubiously taught in a back room among a handful of students. It is the everlasting gospel, and we wish to have it proclaimed in market and street, before learned Brahmins and uneducated Africans. We would have it told out in the back slums of London, and preached before lords and ladies and royalty itself. It does not matter where; salvation by faith is never out of place. This is a doctrine never to be covered up, nor veiled, nor qualified. "He that believes in Him has everlasting life,"—out with it and hesitate not.

It is a pretty thing which is told of the father of Mr. Newman Hall, and the author of "The Sinner's Friend," that his common seal that he always delighted to use was a crown with an anchor fixed into it, with just these words, "Other refuge have I none." Well, if you do not use that seal, if you do not write the words over the door of your house, yet take care that you bear their meaning in your hearts. Have my text written in your hearts by the Spirit, so that you are sure and certain of it beyond all doubt upon the matter, and also do so glory over it that you never hesitate on any occasion to confess that you are saved by faith in Christ Jesus.

Dear hearers, do you really know this truth in your own souls? Have you believed in Jesus, or have you not? Are any of you trying to establish a righteousness of your own? Are you laboring as in the very fire to get peace where you will never find it? Oh, come away from your ceremonies and your sacraments, come away from your feelings, come away even from your prayers and your almsgiving, come away from everything upon which you rely, and believe in Jesus, the appointed Savior. Come away even from your own faith, for you must not rely upon it. Come and trust only in Jesus, who, being very God of very God, made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and in that servant form bled even to the death in the sinner's place, that

whoever will trust Him may be justified in the sight of God. Rest there, one and all of you. Oh may God help you at this very moment to do so, and then we will meet in heaven, all of us, if there is no exception to the believing, there shall be no exception in the salvation, for “He that believes in Him has everlasting life.”

1643 THE LORD'S TRIAL – MARK 14:64

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, February 5, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

And they all condemned Him to be guilty of death.

— Mark 14:64

*[Scripture Read before Sermon – John 23:12-24;
Mark 14:53-65 and Luke 22:66-71]*

THIS ONE SENTENCE is selected because custom demands a text, but in reality we shall follow the entire narrative of our Lord's trial before the high priests. We shall see how the Sanhedrin arrived at their unrighteous sentence, and what they did afterwards, and so, in a sense, we shall be keeping to our text. We have just been reading three passages—John 18:12-24; Mark 14:53-65 and Luke 22:66-71. Please carry these in your minds while I rehearse the mournful story.

The narrative of our Lord's grief, if it is carefully studied, is harrowing in the extreme. One cannot long think of it without tears. In fact, I have personally known what it is to be compelled to leave my meditations upon it from excess of emotion. It is enough to make one's heart fully break to realize the sufferings of such a One, so lovely in Himself and so loving toward us. Yet this harrowing of the feelings is exceedingly useful, the after result of it is truly admirable. After mourning for Jesus we are raised above our mourning. There is no

consolation under heaven at all like it, for the sorrows of Christ seem to take the sting out of our own sorrows, till they become harmless and endurable. A sympathetic contemplation of our Lord's grief so dwarfs our griefs, that they are reckoned to be but light afflictions, too petty, too insignificant, to be mentioned in the same day. We dare not write ourselves down in the list of the sorrowful at all, when we have just seen the sharp pains of the Man of Sorrows. The wounds of Jesus distil a balm which heals all mortal ills.

Nor is this all, though that were much in a world of woe like this, but there is a matchless stimulus about the passion of the Lord. Though you have been almost crushed by the sight of your Lord's agonies, you have risen from them strong, resolute, fervent, consecrated. Nothing stirs our hearts' depths like His heart's anguish. Nothing is too hard for us to attempt or to endure for One who sacrificed Himself for us. To be reviled for His dear sake who suffered such shame for us becomes no great affliction, even reproach, itself, when borne for Him, becomes greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. To suffer in body and in mind, even unto death, for Him, were rather a privilege than an exaction, such love so swells our hearts that we vehemently pant for some way of expressing our indebtedness. We are grieved to think that our best will be so little, but we are solemnly resolved to give nothing less than our best to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.

I believe also that full often careless hearts have been greatly affected by the sufferings of Jesus. They have been disturbed in their indifference, convinced of their ingratitude, weaned from their love of sin, and attracted to Christ by hearing what He bore on their behalf. No loadstone can draw human hearts like the cross of Christ. His wounds cause even hearts of stone to bleed. His shame makes obstinacy itself ashamed. Men never so plentifully fall before the great bow of

God as when its arrows are dipped in the blood of Jesus. Those darts which are armed with His agonies cause wounds such as never can be healed except by His own pierced hands. These are the weapons which slay the sin and save the sinner, killing at one stroke both his self-confidence and his despair, and leaving him a captive to that conqueror whose glory it is to make men free.

This morning I would not only preach the doctrines that come out of the cross, but the cross itself. I suppose that was one of the great differences between the first preaching of all and the preaching after the Reformation. After the Reformation we had clearly ringing out from all pulpits the doctrine of justification by faith and other glorious truths, which I hope will be made more and more prominent. But the first fathers of the church set forth the same truths in a less theological fashion. If they dwell little upon justification by faith they were wonderfully full upon the blood and its cleansing power, the wounds and their healing efficacy, the death of Jesus and our eternal life. We will go back to their style for a while, and preach the facts about our Lord Jesus Christ rather than the doctrinal inferences from them. Oh, that the Holy Spirit would so bring the sorrows of our Lord near to each heart, that every one of us may know the fellowship of His sufferings, and possess faith in His salvation and reverent love for His person.

I. We will begin our narrative this morning by first asking you to think of **THE PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION OF OUR BLESSED LORD AND MASTER BY THE HIGH PRIESTS**. They brought in our Lord from the garden, bound, but they also kept fast hold upon Him, for we read of “the men that held Him.” They were evidently afraid of their prisoner, even when they had Him entirely in their power. He was all gentleness and submission, but conscience made cowards of them all, and they

therefore took all a coward's care to hold Him in their grasp. As the court had not yet gathered in sufficient numbers for a general examination, the high priest resolved that he would fill up the time by personally interrogating his prisoner.

He commenced his malicious exercise. 'The high priest asked Jesus *concerning His disciples*. We cannot tell what the questions were, but I suppose they were something like these; "How is it that You have gathered about You a band of men? What did they do with You? What was Your ultimate intention to do by their means? Who were they? Were they not a set of fanatics, or men discontented and ready for sedition?" I do not know how the crafty Caiaphas put his questions, but the Savior gave no reply to this particular inquiry. What could He have said if He had attempted to answer? Ah, brothers and sisters, what good could He have said of His disciples? We may be sure He would say no ill. He might have said, "Concerning My disciples, one of them has betrayed Me. He has still the blood-money in his hands which you gave him as My price. Another of them, down in the hall there, before the cock crows will deny that he ever knew Me and add oaths and cursing to his denial. And as for the rest, they have all forsaken Me and fled." Therefore our Lord said nothing concerning His disciples, for He will not become the accuser of His own, whom He came not to condemn, but to justify.

The high priest also asked Him concerning *His doctrine*. I suppose he said to Jesus, "What new teaching is this of Yours? Are *we* not sufficient to teach the people—the Scribes so learned in the law, the Pharisees so attentive to ritual, the Sadducees so philosophical and speculative? Why need you intrude into this domain? I suppose You to be little more than a peasant's son, what is this strange teaching of Yours?"

To this inquiry our Lord did answer and what a *triumphant reply* it was! Oh that we could always speak, when it is right to

speak, as meekly and as wisely as He! He said, “I spoke openly to the world; I always taught in the synagogue and in the temple, where the Jews always resort, and in secret I have said nothing. Why ask you Me? Ask them which heard Me what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I have said.” Oh, brethren, no reply to slander can be compared with a blameless life. Jesus had lived in the full blaze of day where all could see, and yet He was able to challenge accusation and say, “Ask them which heard Me.” Happy is the man who has no need to defend himself because his works and words are solid testimonials to his uprightness and goodness. Our Savior answered His interrogator very gently, but yet most effectually, by His appeal to facts. He stands before us at once the mirror of meekness and the paragon of perfection, with slander like a wounded snake writhing at His feet. What a delight to have this triumphant pleader for our advocate, to urge His own righteousness in our defense! None can impugn His absolute perfection, and that perfection covers all His saints this day. Who shall accuse us, now that Jesus has undertaken to plead for us?

This overwhelming answer, however, brought the Savior *a blow from one of the officers of the court* who stood by. Was not this a most shocking deed? Here was the first of a new order of assaults. Up to now we have not heard of strokes and blows, but now it is fulfilled, “They shall smite the Judge of Israel with a rod upon His cheek.” This was the first of a long series of assaults. I wonder who the man was that struck the Master. I could wish that the Master’s reply to him may have influenced his heart to repentance, but if not, it is certain that he led the van in personal assaults upon our Lord’s person; his impious hand first struck Him. Surely if he died in impenitence, the memory of that blow must remain as a never-dying worm within him. Today he cries, “I was the first to smite Him, I

struck Him on the mouth with the palm of my hand.” The old writers upon the Passion give us various details of the injuries inflicted upon the Savior by that blow, but we attach no importance to such traditions, and therefore will not repeat them, but simply say that there was general belief in the church that this blow was a very grievous one, and caused the Savior much pain. Yet while He felt that blow, and was perhaps half staggered by it, the Master did not lose His composure, or exhibit the least resentment. His reply was everything it ought to be. There is not a word too much. He does not say, “God shall smite you, you whited wall,” as did the apostle Paul. We will not censure the servant, but we will far more commend the Master. He meekly said, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why did you strike Me?” Enough, surely, if there remained any tenderness in the heart of the aggressor, to have made him turn his hand upon his own breast in penitential grief. One would not have wondered had he cried out, “Forgive me, O You divinely meek and gentle One, and let me from now on be Your disciple.”

Thus have we seen the first part of our Lord's sufferings in the house of the high priest, and the lesson from it is just this—let us be meek and lowly in heart as the Savior was, for herein lay His strength and dignity. You tell me I have said that before. Yes, brethren, and I shall have to say it several more times before you and I have learned the lesson well. It is hard to be meek when falsely accused, meek when roughly interrogated, meek when a cunning adversary is on the catch, meek when smarting under a cruel blow which was a disgrace to a court of justice. You have heard of the patience of Job, but it pales before the patience of Jesus. Admire His forbearance, but do not stop at admiration, copy His example, write under this headline and follow every stroke. O Spirit of God, even with Christ for an example, we shall not learn meekness unless You

teach us, and even with You for a teacher, we shall not learn it unless we take His yoke upon us and learn of Him, for it is only at His feet, and under Your Divine anointing that we shall ever become meek and lowly of heart, and so find rest unto our souls.

The preliminary examination is therefore over, and it has ended in no success whatever for the high priest. He has questioned Jesus and he has struck Him, but the ordeal brings nothing to content the adversary. The prisoner is supremely victorious, the assailant is baffled.

II. Now a second scene comes, **THE SEARCH FOR WITNESSES AGAINST HIM.** “The chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put Him to death; and found none.” It is a strange court that meets with the design to find the prisoner guilty, resolved in some way or other to compass his death. They must proceed according to the forms of justice, and so they summon witnesses, though all the while they violate the spirit of justice, for they ransack Jerusalem to find witnesses who will perjure themselves to accuse the Lord. Every man of the council is writing down somebody's name who may be fetched in from the outside, for the people have come from all parts of the land to keep the Passover, and surely some may be hunted up who, in one place or another, have heard Him use an objectionable mode of speech. They fetch in, therefore, everyone that they can find of that degraded class who will venture upon perjuring themselves if a bribe is forthcoming. They scour Jerusalem to bring forth witnesses against Jesus, but they had great difficulty in accomplishing their design, because they were bound to examine the witnesses separately, and they could not make them agree. Lies cannot be easily made to pair with each other, whereas truths are cut to the same pattern. Moreover, many sorts of witnesses that they could readily find they did not dare

to bring forward. Witnesses were forthcoming who could testify that Jesus had spoken against the tradition of the elders, but in that some, who were in the council, namely, the Sadducees, were agreed with Him to a large extent. It would never do to bring forward a charge about which they would not be unanimous. His denunciations of the Pharisees could not be the charge, for these pleased the Sadducees, neither could they allege His outcry against the Sadducees, for in this the Pharisees were agreed with Him. You remember how Paul, when brought before this Sanhedrin, took advantage of their division of opinion and cried, "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question," and in this manner created a dissension among the conclave, which for a time worked in his favor. Our Lord took higher and nobler ground, and did not stoop to turn their folly to His own benefit, yet, they being conscious of their internal feuds cautiously avoided those points upon which they were not in harmony. They might have brought forward their old grievance that the Lord Jesus did not observe the Sabbath after their fashion, but then it would have come out more publicly that He had healed the sick on the Sabbath. It would not do to publish that fact, for who would think of putting a person to death for having opened the eyes of one born blind, or having restored a withered arm on the Sabbath? That kind of witness was therefore set aside. But might they not have found some witnesses to swear that He had talked about a kingdom that He was setting up? Might not this readily have been made to mean sedition and rebellion? Yes, but then that was rather a charge to allege against Him before Pilate's civil court, whereas theirs was an ecclesiastical tribunal. Moreover, there were Herodians in the council who were very restive under the Roman yoke, and could not have had the face to condemn anyone for being a patriot, and besides, the people outside would have

sympathized with Jesus all the more if they had supposed that He would lead them on a rebellion against Caesar. Therefore they could not urge that point. They must have been greatly puzzled to know what to do. Especially when even on those points which they decided to bring forward, the witnesses no sooner opened their mouths than they contradicted each other. At last they had it. There came two whose evidence was somewhat agreed, and they asserted that on a certain occasion Jesus Christ had said, "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands." Here was blasphemy against the holy and beautiful house of the Lord, and this would serve their turn. Now, the Savior had said something which was a little like the testimony of these false witnesses, and a misunderstanding had made it more like it. But still their statement was a lie, and none the less a lie because a shadow of truth had fallen upon it, for the worst kind of lie is that which is manufactured out of a truth, it does a great deal more mischief than if it were a falsehood from stem to stern. The Savior had not said, "I will destroy this temple." He said, "Destroy this temple," that is to say, "You will destroy it, and you may destroy it." He had not referred to the Jerusalem temple at all, this spoke He concerning the temple of His body which would be destroyed. Christ has never said, "Destroy this temple which is made with hands, and I will build another without hands." In His language there is no allusion to hands at all. These refinements were of their own inventing, and His language gave no color for them. He had not said, "I will build another." He had said, "I will raise it up," which is quite a different thing. He meant that His body, after being destroyed, would be raised up again on the third day. They had altered a word here and a word there, the mood of one verb and the form of another, and so they made out our Lord to say what He never thought of. Yet even on that charge

they did not agree. One said one thing upon it, and another said another, so that even this paltry accusation could not be brought against the Savior. Their patched-up falsehood was made of such rotten stuff that the pieces would not hold together. They were ready to swear to anything that came into their perjured imaginations, but they could not be gotten to swear any two of them, to the same thing.

Meanwhile the Lord Himself *stands silent*, like the sheep before her shearers, He is dumb and opens not His mouth, and I suppose the reason was partly that He might fulfill the prophecy, partly because the grandeur of His soul could not stoop to contend with liars and most of all because His innocence needed no defense. He that is in some measure guilty is eager to apologize and to extenuate, his excuses usually suggest to men of experience, the belief that there may be some ground for the accusation. He that is perfectly innocent is in no haste to answer his slanderers, for they soon answer one another. Our Lord did not desire to get into a vain jangle with them, and so to lead them, on to utter still more falsehoods. If speech can do no good then indeed silence is wise. When the only result would have been to provoke His enemies to add to their iniquities, it was magnanimous compassion which led the slandered Savior to hold His speech.

We must not refrain from noticing *the comfort* which in some degree had been ministered to our Lord by the accusation which came most to the front. He stands there, and He knows they are about to put Him to death, but they themselves remind Him that their power over Him has no longer lease than three days, and at the end of that short time He will be raised up again, no more to be at their disposal. His enemies witnessed the resurrection to Him. I say not that His memory was weak, or that He would possibly have forgotten it amid His sorrows, but yet our Lord was human, and modes of comfort which are

valuable to us were also useful to Him. When the mind is tortured with malicious falsehood, and the whole man is tossed about by pains and griefs, it is good for us to be reminded of the consolations of God. We read of some who were “tortured, not accepting deliverance,” and it was the hope of resurrection which sustained them. Our Lord knew that His soul would not be left in the abodes of the dead, neither should His flesh see corruption, and the false witnesses brought this vividly before His mind. Now, indeed, could our Redeemer say, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” These ravens have brought the Savior bread and meat. In these dead lions our glorious Samson has found honey. Sustained by the joy that was set before Him, He despises the shame. Strange, that there should come out of the mouths of those who sought His blood, the memorial of one of His greatest glories.

Now, brethren, here again we learn the same lesson as before, namely, let us gain meekness, and prove it by our power to hold our tongues. Eloquence is difficult to acquire, but silence is far harder to practice. A man may much sooner learn to speak well than learn not to speak at all. We are in such a hurry to vindicate our own cause that we damage it by rash speech. If we were calm, gentle, quiet, forbearing, as the Savior was, our pathway to victory would be much easier.

Observe, again, the armor with which Christ was clad, see the invulnerable shield of His holiness. His life was such that slander could not frame an accusation against Him which would last long enough to be repeated. So frail were the charges that, like bubbles, they vanished as soon as they saw the light. Our Lord's enemies were utterly baffled. They hurled their darts against Him, but, as if they fell upon a shield of blazing diamond, every arrow was broken and consumed.

Learn also this other lesson that we must expect to be misrepresented. We may reckon that our words will have other

meanings to ungracious ears than those which we intended. We may expect that when we teach one thing which is true, they will make us out to have stated another which is false. But let us not be overwhelmed by this fiery trial as though it were some strange thing. Our Lord, and Master, has endured it and the servants must not escape it. Therefore endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, and be not afraid.

Amid the din of these lies and perjuries, I hear the still small voice of a truth most precious, for like as Jesus stood for us at the bar, and they could not cause an accusation to abide upon Him, so when we shall stand in Him at the last great day, washed in His blood and covered with His righteousness, we too shall be clear. “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?” If Satan should appear as the accuser of the brethren, he will be met by the voice, “The Lord rebuke you, O Satan, even the Lord that has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you: is not this a brand plucked out of the burning?” Yes, beloved, we too shall be cleared of slander; then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The glorious righteousness of Him who was falsely accused shall deliver the saints and all iniquity shall stop her mouth.

III. But I must not dwell too long even on such themes as these, and therefore I pass on to **THE PERSONAL INTERROGATION** which followed upon the failure to bring forward witnesses. The high priest, too indignant to sit still, rises and stands over the prisoner like a lion roaring over his prey, and begins to question Him again. It was an unrighteous thing to do. Should the judge who sits to administer law set himself to prove the prisoner guilty, or, what is worse, shall he try to extort a confession from the accused which may be used against him? It was a tacit confession that Christ had been proven innocent up till then. The high priest would not have needed to draw something out of the accused one if there had

been sufficient material against Him elsewhere. The trial had been a dead failure up to that point, and he knew it, and he was red with rage. Now he attempts to bully the prisoner, that he may extract some declaration from Him which may save all further trouble of witnesses, and end the matter. The question was forced home by a solemn adjuration, and it achieved its purpose, for the Lord Jesus did speak, though He knew that He was thereby furnishing a weapon against Himself. He felt under bond to answer the high priest of His people when He used such adjuration, bad man as that high priest was, and He could not draw back from a charge so solemn lest He should seem by His silence to deny the truth upon which the salvation of the world is made to hinge. So when the high priest asked Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed," how distinctly and outspoken was the Master's reply. Though He knew that His death would thus be compassed, He witnessed a good confession. He plainly said, "I am," and then He added to that declaration, "You shall see the Son of man"—so He brings out His humanity as well as His deity, "sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." What a majestic faith! It is wonderful to think that He should be so calm as to confront His mockers, and assert His glory while He was in the depths of shame. He did as good as say, "You sit as My judges, but I shall soon sit as your judge, I seem to you to be an insignificant peasant, but I am the Son of the Blessed. You think that you will crush Me, but you never will, for I shall speedily sit at the right hand of the power of God, and come in the clouds of heaven." He speaks boldly, as well became Him. I admire the meekness that could be silent, I admire the meekness that could speak gently, but I still wonder more at the meekness, that could speak courageously and still be meek. Somehow or other, when we awaken ourselves to courage we let in harshness in the same door, or if we shut out

our anger, we are very apt to forget our firmness. Jesus never slays one virtue to make room for another. His character is complete, full-orbed, perfect, whichever way we look at it.

And surely, brethren, this must have brought another sweet consolation to our divine Master's heart. While smarting under that cruel blow, while writhing under those filthy accusations, while enduring such contradiction of sinners against Himself, He must have felt satisfied from within in the consciousness of His Sonship and His power, and in the prospect of His glory and triumph. A well of water springs up within His soul as He foresees that He shall sit at the right hand of God, and that He shall judge the quick and the dead, and vindicate His redeemed. It is a wise thing to have these consolations always ready to hand. The enemy may not see their consolatory power, but we see it. To us from beneath the altar there issues forth a stream whose gentle flow supplies our spirits with a quiet gladness such as all earth's waters can never rival. Even now we also hear the Father say, "I am your shield and your exceeding great reward."

Notice, before we pass away from this point that practically, the trial and the interrogation ended in our Lord's being *condemned because of His avowal of His deity*. They said, "You have heard the blasphemy: what do you think? And they all condemned Him to be guilty of death." I cannot make out at all those people who call themselves Unitarians, and deny our Lord's deity. Unitarians we also are, for we believe in one God, and only one God, but they tell us that this blessed Christ our Master, is not God, and yet they admit that He was the most excellent of men, the most perfect of human beings. I cannot see it myself. He seems to me to be a blasphemer, and nothing else, if He is not God, and the Jews evidently held that opinion, and treated Him accordingly. If he had not said that God was His Father, they would not have been so enraged against Him.

They put Him to death because of the assertion of His deity, and the declaration that He would sit at the right hand of power and judge the world. Today multitudes are willing to take Christ as a teacher, but they will not have Him as the Son of God. I do not doubt that the Christian religion might be received in many places if it were shorn of its strength, if, in fact, its very soul and heart were torn out of it, by setting forth Jesus as one of the prophets and nothing more. Hear how our wise men talk of Him as one of a line of great reformers, such as Moses, Samuel, Elijah, and they often add Confucius and Mohammed. Do we give place to this, no, not for an instant. He is verily the Son of the Blessed. He is divine or false. The accusation of blasphemy must lie against Him if He is not the Son of the Highest.

IV. We must now pass on and linger for a second or two over **THE CONDEMNATION**. They condemned Him out of His own mouth, but this, while it wore the semblance of justice, was really unjust. The prisoner at the bar has affirmed that He is the Son of God. What next? May He not speak the truth? If it is the truth He must not be condemned, but adored. Justice requires that an inquiry be made as to whether He is the Christ, the Son of the Blessed, or not. He has claimed to be the Messiah. Very well, all those in the court are expecting the Messiah; some of them expect Him to appear very speedily. May not this be the sent one of the Lord? Let an inquiry be made into His claims. What is His lineage? Where was He born? Have any prophets attested Him? Has He worked miracles? Some such inquiries are due to any man whose life is at stake. You cannot justly condemn a man to die without examining into the truth of his defense, for it may turn out that his statements are correct. But, no, they will not hear the Man they hate, the mere claim condemns Him, it is blasphemy, and He must die.

He says He is the Son of God. Come, then, Caiaphas and council, call for witnesses for the defense. Inquire whether blind eyes have been opened and the dead raised up. Ask whether He has worked miracles such as no man ever worked in the midst of Israel throughout all time. Why not do this? O no, He must be taken from prison and from judgment, and none shall declare His generation. The less inquiry the more easy to condemn Him unjustly. He has said He is the Christ and the Son of God; He is therefore guilty of death. Alas, how many there are who condemn Christ's doctrine without making due inquiries into it—condemn it on the most trivial grounds. They come to hear a sermon, and perhaps find fault with the mannerism of the preacher, as if that were sufficient reason for denying the truth which he preaches, or else they say, "This is so strange—we cannot believe it." Why not? Are not strange things sometimes true, and is not many a truth wondrously strange until you get familiar with it? These men will not condescend to hear Christ's proof of claim, they will make no inquiry. In this, like the Jewish priests, they practically cry, "Away with Him! Away with Him!"

He is condemned to die, and the high priest tears his clothes. I do not know whether he wore at that time the robes in which he ministered, but doubtless he wore some garb peculiar to his sacerdotal office, and this he tore. Oh, how significant! The house of Aaron and the tribe of Levi had their garments torn, and the temple, within a few hours, tore its veil from the top to the bottom, for priests and temple were alike abolished. They little knew it, but in all they did there was a singular significance, those torn garments were an index of the fact that now the Aaronic priesthood was forever torn, and the great Melchisedec priesthood had come in, for the true Melchisedec then and there, stood before them in all the majesty of His patience.

Observe that they were all agreed, there was no dissention, they had taken care, I have no doubt, not to let Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea know anything about this meeting of theirs. They held it in the night, and they only rehearsed it in the early morning, for the sake of keeping their old Rabbinical law that they must try prisoners by daylight. They hurried up the trial, and any that might have spoken against their bloodthirsty sentence were kept out of the way. The assembly was unanimous. Alas for the unanimity of ungodly hearts against Christ! It is amazing that there should be such quarrels among Christ's friends, and such unity among His foes, when the point is to put Him to death. I never heard of quarrels among devils, nor did I ever read of sects in hell, they are all one in their hatred of the Christ and of God. But here we are split up into sections and parties, and often at war with one another. O, Lord of love forgive us, King of Concord, come and reign over us, and bring us into a perfect unity around Yourself.

The sentence was "death." I say nothing of it but this. Death was the sentence due to me, the sentence due to you, and they laid it upon our Substitute. "Worthy of death"—they said—all of them. All hands were held up, all voices said, "Yes, yes" to the verdict. Yet there was no fault in Him. Say rather, there was every excellence in Him. As I hear Jesus condemned to die my soul falls at His feet and cries, "Blessed Lord, now have You taken my condemnation. There is, therefore, none for me. Now have You taken my cup of death to drink, and from now on it is dry to me. Glory be to Your blessed name, from now on and forever."

V. I am almost glad that my time is so far advanced, for I must set before you the fifth and most painful scene. No sooner have these evil men of the Sanhedrin pronounced Him guilty of death, than the servants, the guards, and those that

kept the high priests' hall, eager to please their masters, and all touched with the same brute-like spirit which was in them, straightway began to *abuse* the infinite majesty of our Lord. Consider **THE ABUSE**. Let me read the words, "Some began to spit on Him." "Began to spit on Him!" Thus was contempt expressed more effectively than by words. Be astonished, O heavens, and be horribly afraid. His face is the light of the universe, His Person is the glory of heaven, and they "began to spit on Him!" Alas, my God, that man should be so base! Some went further, and they "covered His face." It is an Eastern custom to cover the face of the condemned, as if they were not fit to see the light, nor fit to behold their fellow men. I know not whether for this reason, or in pure mockery, they covered His face, so that they could not see it, and He could not see them. How could they thus put out the sun and shut up bliss? Then when all was dark to Him, we read that they began to say, "Prophecy, Who is he that struck You?" Then another did the same, and many were the cruel cuffs they laid about His blessed face. The mediaeval writers delighted to talk about the teeth that were broken, the bruises on the checks, the blood which flowed, the flesh that was bruised and blackened, but we dare not thus imagine. Scripture has cast a veil, and there let it abide. Yet it must have been an awful sight to see the Lord of glory with His face stained by their accursed spit and bruised with their cruel fists. Here insult and cruelty were combined, ridicule of His prophetic claims and dishonor to His divine person. Nothing was thought bad enough. They invented all they could of shame and scorn, and He stood patient there though a single flash of His eyes would have consumed them in a moment.

Brothers, sisters, this is what our sin deserved. A shameful thing you are, O sin! You deserve to be spit upon! This is what sin is constantly doing to Christ. Whenever you and I sin we do, as it were, spit in His face. We also hide His eyes by trying

to forget that He sees us, and we also hit Him whenever we transgress and grieve His Spirit. Talk not of cruel Jews, let us think of ourselves, and let us be humbled by the thought. This is what the ungodly world is always doing to our blessed Master. They also would hide His eyes which are the light of the world. They also despise His gospel, and spit upon it as an utterly worn out and worthless thing. They also do despite to the members of His body through His poor afflicted saints who have to bear slander and abuse for His dear sake.

And yet over all this I seem to see a light most blessed. Christ must be spit upon, for He has taken our sin. Christ must be tortured, for He is standing in our place. Who is to be the executioner of all this grief? Who shall take upon himself the office of putting Christ to shame? Our redemption was being worked out this way—who shall be the drudge to perform this miserable work? Fling in the clusters richer than the grapes of Eshcol, fling them in, but who shall tread them out and laboriously extract the wine, the generous wine which cheers God and man? The feet shall be the willing feet of Christ's own adversaries, they shall extort from Him that which shall redeem us and destroy all evil. I rejoice to see Satan outwitted, and his malice made to be the means of his own overthrow. He thinks to destroy Christ, and by that deed he destroys himself. He pulls down evil upon his own head and falls into the pit which he has dug. Thus shall all evil always work for the good of the Lord's people. Yes, their greatest good shall often come out of that which threatened their ruin, and worked in them the utmost anguish. Three days must the Christ suffer and die and lie in the grave. But after that He must bruise the serpent's head and lead captivity captive and that by the means of the very suffering and shame which He is now enduring. In the same manner shall it happen to His mystical body, and Satan shall be bruised under our feet shortly.

I leave this subject, hoping that you will pursue it in your meditations. Here are three observations.

First, how ready should we be to bear slander and ridicule for Jesus' sake. Do not get into a huff, and think it a hard thing that people should mock you. Who are you, dear sir? Who are you? What can you be if compared with Christ? If they spat upon Him, why should they not spit upon you? If they buffeted Him, why should they not buffet you? Shall your Master have all the rough of it? Shall He have all the bitter, and you all the sweet? A pretty soldier, you, to demand better fare than your Captain!

How earnestly, next, ought we to honor our dear Lord. If men were so eager to put Him to shame, let us be ten times more earnest to bring Him glory. Is there anything we can do today, by which He may be honored? Let us set about it. Can we make any sacrifice? Can we perform any difficult task which would glorify Him? Let us not deliberate, but at once do it with all our might. Let us be inventive in modes of glorifying Him, even as His adversaries were ingenious in the methods of His shame.

Lastly, how surely and how sweetly may all who believe in Him come and rest their souls in His hands. Surely know that He who suffered this, since He was verily the Son of the Blessed, must have ability to save us. Such griefs must be a full atonement for our transgressions. Glory be to God, that spit on His countenance means a clear, bright face for me. Those false accusations on His character mean no condemnation for me. That putting Him to death proves the certainty of our text last Sunday morning, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believes on Me has everlasting life." Let us sweetly rest in Jesus, and if ever our faith is agitated, let us get away to the hall of Caiaphas, and see the Just standing for the unjust, the Faultless One bearing condemnation for sinners. Let us, in the high

priest's hall, judge and condemn every sin and every doubt, and come forth glorying that the Christ has conquered for us, and that we now wait with delight for His appearing. God bless you, brothers and sisters, for Christ's sake. Amen.

1644 CHRIST BEFORE PILATE – JOHN 18:38

**A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, February 12, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington**

**“Pilate...said unto them, I find in him no fault at all.” —
John 18:38**

[Scripture Read before Sermon – John 18:28-40, Psalm 2]

I SHOULD LIKE, if God spares us, to present to you on Sabbath mornings the full story of our Savior’s sufferings. We began last Lord’s day by going with Him to the hall of Caiaphas, and it was a sadly solemn time when we beheld the Prince of Peace a prisoner, heard Him falsely accused and unjustly condemned, and then saw Him abused, till servants and abjects did spit in His face and make a mockery of Him. I hope that you will not be wearied with this subject. If so, it will be the fault of the preacher, for the subject is ever full and fresh, or if the preacher be not to blame, there will be something of censure due to his hearers.

If we do grow tired of the story of the cross it will be a sad indication of secret soul-sickness, and it will be well to observe the symptom and hasten to the great Physician for healing. To true saints in a healthy condition there is no place more attractive than the place of our Lord’s passion, where He accomplished the glorious work of our redemption. They love

to linger along that *Via Dolorosa* which leads from Gethsemane to Golgotha, let us linger with them.

When I stand and view my Lord, like the bush in Horeb, burning but not consumed, I hear a voice saying to me, “The place whereon you stand is holy ground.” Nothing is more holy than the person of our divine Master, it is, therefore, well to be with Him. The anguish which He endured when He devoted His person as a sacrifice for us is holy too, and so it is well to be with Him in His sufferings. His sorrows have a most sanctifying influence upon all who consider them with believing love. I am persuaded that if we lived more in the atmosphere of the cross sin would lose its power, and every grace would flourish.

When we draw very near to Him and have fellowship with Him in His sufferings we raise a hue and cry against the sin which slew Him, and resolve to be revenged upon it by departing from it ourselves, and by warring against it whenever we see it in others. The cross is that holy implement with which we make war with sin till it is utterly destroyed. Blessed and holy, then, are the thoughts which are aroused by our great sacrifice.

Nor is it only so, but the medicine which brings us health is in itself, a joy.

“Sweet the moments, rich in blessing,
Which before the cross I spend,
Life, and health, and peace possessing,
In the sinner’s dying Friend.”

Here is no noise as of them that make merry over their wine, no shout of them that triumph, no song of them that feast, but here is a grave, sweet melody as of hearts that have found rest. At the cross we find a substantial joy, a far-reaching

satisfaction, “the peace of God, which passes all understanding.” Here, you restless ones, is the cure of restlessness, here shall you say, “O God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed. I will sing and give praise.” I shall not, therefore, make any excuse, even if for weeks to come I should lead you to the place of dragons where your Lord was sorely broken, and help you to drink of His cup, and to be baptized with His baptism. May the Spirit of God come upon and open our eyes to read the sacred heart of Him whose sorrows are unrivalled—sorrows borne for love of us.

Let us go to the narrative at once with loving and lowly carefulness. Our Lord was condemned by the chief priests for blasphemy because He declared Himself to be the Son of God, and told them that they should hereafter see Him coming in the clouds of heaven to be their judge. Rending his garments, the high priest said, “What need have we of any further witness? You have heard his blasphemy.” When the morning light had come, and they had gone through the formality of a set trial by daylight, having really condemned Him in the night, they led Jesus away to Pilate.

According to tradition, He was led with a rope about His neck, and His hands bound, and I can fully believe in the tradition when I remember the words of Isaiah, “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter.” It was a strangely sad procession which moved through Jerusalem a little after six in the morning. Those men of the Sanhedrin in all their pomp and power surrounding this one poor victim, whom they were about to deliver to the Gentiles with the one design that He might be put to death! Those wicked men of pride were as the dogs of whom the Psalmist sang when the hind of the morning was his tender theme.

When they came to the house of the Roman governor, they would not themselves enter within its doors. It is said to have

been one of the many magnificent palaces which Herod the Great built for himself, the architecture was gorgeous, the floors were inlaid with choice marbles, and all the chambers were richly gilded and furnished with Oriental splendor. Into the great hall these scrupulous hypocrites would not enter because they must by no means be defiled by the touch of a Gentile, for they had already commenced to keep the Passover. So they waited in the courtyard, and Pilate condescended to come out to them, and learn the pressing business which brought them there so early in the morning.

The Roman governor was proud, and cruel, and abhorred the Jews, but still, knowing their fanaticism and the readiness with which they broke loose at Passover times, he stood at his palace gate and heard their demands. He soon ascertained that they had brought him a prisoner, evidently a poor man, and in personal appearance emaciated, weary, and suffering. About Him there was a mysterious dignity combined with singular gentleness, and Pilate for this and other reasons evidently took a singular interest in Him. Fixing his gaze first upon the extraordinary prisoner, he turned to the angry priests and demanded, "What accusation bring against this man?"

The one objective of the priests in bringing Jesus to Pilate was to get Him put to death, for when Pilate told them to go and judge Him according to their law, they replied that they would gladly do so, but that the power of life and death had been taken from them, implying that nothing but His death would content them. They were, however, very anxious at this stage to lay the responsibility of His death upon the Romans, for the fear of the people was still upon them, and if they could secure his death by Pilate, then they might in after days protest that they merely handed Him over to the Roman governor and could not foresee that He would be handled so roughly.

They had not yet bribed the populace to cry, “Crucify him,” and they were willing to be on the safe side should the people make an uproar on His behalf. Humanly speaking, they could have put Him to death themselves, for He was entirely in their power, and they frequently forgot the Roman law and slew men in riotous fury, as when they stoned Stephen. They had frequently attempted to stone our Lord Himself, so that they were not always so mindful of Roman law.

They might have taken His life on this occasion, but they were led by a mysterious impulse to desire that the actual responsibility of the deed should rest on Pilate. Further on they were willing to join with the fickle throng in sharing the guilt of His blood, but as yet they would fain throw it upon others. During their great festivals if they took innocent blood, their hypocrisy made them wish to do it by forms of law and by an alien hand. To do this they must bring an accusation, for no Roman ruler would condemn a man till an accusation had been made.

We shall, this morning, consider *the two accusations* that they brought, and after that we shall hear *the verdict of acquittal* which Pilate gave in the language of the text, “I find in him no fault at all.”

I. The first accusation, if you will turn to the chapter and read the thirtieth verse, was that He was **A MALEFACTOR**.

“They answered and said unto him, If he was not a malefactor, we would not have delivered Him up to you.” He was said to be a malefactor or doer of that which is evil, a person of such a mischievous life that he ought not to live.

Upon which we remark, first, that *it was a novel charge*. It was hot from their mint, for when He stood before Caiaphas nothing was said of any evil that He had *done*, but only of evil that He had spoken. They charged Him with saying this and that, but not with doing any evil deed. The accusation of evil

speaking had broken down, and they did not venture upon it a second time, because they knew very well that Pilate did not care what the man had said, all he would attend to would be some actual breach of law by act and deed.

The Romans were a practical people, and so when Pilate led our Lord into the audience chamber he said to Him, “What have you *done*?” He did not say to Him, “What have you taught or preached?” but, “What have you *done*?” For this reason, the priests brought forward this newly-invented accusation and totally unfounded charge that He was a bad doer, which might mean little or much, as the hearer chose to interpret it—malice is seldom specific in its charges. The accusation of being a malefactor grew out of their malevolence, and not out of any action of our Lord’s perfect life.

One is surprised that even hate should be so blind as to assail His perfections. Whatever men may think of our Lord as a teacher, candor demands that they admire His example and award it the highest merit of honor.

Observe, the priests herein brought against our Lord *a charge which they did not attempt to sustain*. How craftily they evaded the task of supplying proof! They brought no witnesses, their evil perjurers were left behind, they even refrained from specific charges, but the general statement that He was a malefactor was supported only by their reputation. “If He were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up to you,” as much as to say, “You must take it for granted that He is guilty, or we would not say so. Here is our high priest, can it be supposed that such a gem of an individual would bring a false accusation? We also are the chief priests and the scribes, and teachers of Israel, can it be imagined that persons of our station and sanctity could by any possibility have brought an innocent person before you to be condemned!”

This style of argument I have heard even in these days, we are expected to give up the faith because scientists condemn it, and they are such eminent persons that we ought to accept their dicta without further delay. I confess I am not prepared to accept their infallibility any more than that which hails from Rome. The Roman governor was not to be overridden by priests, neither are we to be led by the nose by pretendedly learned men. “If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up to you.” Oh, the hypocrisy of this speech! They had tried to bring witnesses, and no witness had been found.

They had suborned false witnesses, but these had so differed in their testimony that the whole thing broke down. They, therefore, go upon another tack, and put their own names at the back of the indictment, as if that were quite enough, and inquiry need go no further. I think I see the scornful glance of Pilate as he bade them judge Him themselves if that was their style of justice, as for him, he must hear an accusation or dismiss them to do their own pleasure if they dare. He knew that through envy they had brought Jesus to him, and he loathed the hypocrites as he heard the wretched syllables sibilating from their sanctimonious lips.

They could not have sustained the charge, and so far they were wise in not attempting the impossible. They might be foolhardy enough to wrest His words, but they hesitated before the task of attacking His deeds. Before His awful holiness they were for the moment out of heart, and knew not what slander to invent. O Lord, we marvel that any men should find fault with You, for You are altogether lovely, and there is in You no spot for falsehood to light upon. But I want to call your attention to this remarkable fact, that although this charge of being a malefactor was a grievous one, a trumped up one, and unsustained by any evidence, yet *it was never denied by the Lord Jesus Christ*.

It was useless to deny it before the priests. He had already challenged them to find fault with His life, saying, "I spoke openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why ask you me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said." His appeal had been unavailing, for it was as useless to argue with them as for a lamb to enter into controversy with a pack of wolves eager to devour. But there might have been some use, one would think, in his answering to Pilate, for Pilate was evidently very favorably impressed with his prisoner, and if the Savior had deigned to give a full account of His life, and to prove that instead of being a malefactor He had gone about doing good, might He not have escaped?

The answer is this, our Lord had come on earth on purpose to be the substitute for guilty men, and so when He was called a malefactor, although it was not a truthful charge, yet He patiently bore the shame of it, as it is written, "He was numbered with the transgressors." He was willing to stand in the transgressor's place, and when they put Him there He did not stir from it. "He is dumb, he opens not his mouth." He says nothing because, though in Him is no sin, He has taken our sin upon Himself.

The question that Pilate put, "What have you done?" was one which Jesus might have grandly answered—"What have I done? I have fed the hungry, I have healed the sick, I have raised the fallen, and I have restored the dead. What have I done? I have lived a self-sacrificing life, caring nothing for Myself or My own honor. I have been the vindicator of God and the friend of man. What have I done? Certainly nothing for wherefore they could put Me to death, but everything why they should accept me as their Leader and their Savior." We hear

not a word of this. The exculpation would have been complete, but it was not spoken.

He might have baffled His enemies as He had aforetime vanquished those who came to take Him, so that they went back to their masters, saying, “Never man spoke like this man.” He might have cleared Himself before the Roman procurator and by coming forth in triumph, He might have escaped from their teeth, but because He would stand in our stead, therefore when men imagined mischievous things against Him He was as a deaf man, and as a dumb man He opened not His mouth. Let us adore and bless Him for His gracious condescension, His matchless grace in standing in our stead.

Yet further, our Lord willed that by being counted as a transgressor by Pilate He might die the death appointed for malefactors by the Roman law. If the Jews had put our Lord to death for blasphemy, it would have been by stoning, but then, none of the prophecies concerning the Messiah spoke of His being dashed to the ground by stones. The death ordained for Him was crucifixion. John says in the eighteenth chapter at the thirty-second verse, “That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which He spoke, signifying what death He should die.” What was that saying? Is it not the saying in the twelfth chapter of John’s gospel at the thirty-second verse, “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This He said, signifying what death He should die.”

Being lifted up from the earth on the cross was a death which could only come from the Romans, the Jews, as I have said before, executed men by stoning, therefore He must be condemned by the Romans that His own words may be fulfilled. He had spoken even more expressly in a passage recorded by Matthew, in the twentieth chapter at the seventeenth verse, where He had declared how He would die. “And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples

apart in the way, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem: and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.”

In order that the word which He had spoken might be fulfilled, our blessed Master refused to plead before Pilate anything in answer to the question, “What have you done?” He stands as a transgressor, to die a transgressor’s death, wherefore forever blessed be his adorable name for His voluntary endurance of penalty for our sakes.

When I think of that word “malefactor,” another word leaps to my lips directly. Call Him not malefactor, but **BENEFACTOR**. What a benefactor must He be who in order to benefit us allows Himself to be branded as a “malefactor!” Only think that He who at this moment sits in the center of adoring angels should have been called, “malefactor,” that He from whose inexhaustible store of goodness all the saints in heaven and on earth are fed should yet be called, “malefactor,” that He who never thought of harm to men, but whose very soul is love, whose every word and thought has been kindness towards this fallen race, should yet be called “malefactor.” O earth, how could you bear so grave a lie against the infinite goodness of the Son of God! And yet, forever blessed be His name, He does not hurl back the charge, for that would have been to ruin us. He meekly bears the scandal for our sakes.

Should not this sweeten every title of reproach that can ever fall upon us? What if they call us ill names! They called the Master of the home “malefactor,” can they call us anything worse? Shall we look for honor where our Captain found nothing but shame? Wherefore let it be our glory to bear shame and reproach for Jesus’ sake. So much for the first accusation.

II. Secondly, when the priests and scribes found that merely calling Him a malefactor was not sufficient, these wretched men changed their tactics, and according to Luke, they charged Him with setting up to be **A KING**.

They said that He wrought sedition; that He forbade to pay tribute unto Caesar, and made Himself out to be a king. These were three great lies, for Jesus had preached peace, and not sedition, His example was submission, not rebellion, His spirit was that of a servant, not that of a turbulent party leader. He had never said that men were not to pay tribute to Caesar, on the contrary, He had said, “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,” and submitted Himself to every ordinance of authority. He had never in their sense set Himself up to be a king, if He had done so, many who were now His accusers might have been His partisans.

The charge against Jesus of setting up to be a king in the sense in which they desired Pilate to understand them *was utterly false*, for when the multitude had been fed, they would have taken Him and made Him a king, but He hid Himself. Nay, so far from wishing to be a king, when one said to Him, “Master, speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me,” He said, “Who made me a judge or a divider over you?” He put aside any approach to interference with the reigning powers. His accusers must have known that if He had willed He had power at His back to have supported His claims, even as He said to Pilate, that, if He had been a king of a worldly dominion, His servants would have fought for Him.

His followers had been brave and courageous, and enthusiastic, and they would, no doubt, have given no end of trouble both to the Jews and to the Romans if their leader had claimed a temporal sovereignty. But our Lord had made Peter put up his sword into its sheath, and healed the wound which he had given. All His life long He had preached peace and love,

and a kingdom which is righteousness and peace. He was no rival to Caesar, and they knew it.

And please to notice that this charge of Christ being a king *did not come from the governing power*. When Pilate asked our Lord, “Are you the King of the Jews?” our Savior wisely replied, “Say you this of yourself, or did another tell you it of me? Have you any reason to think that I am a leader of sedition? As the governor of this nation you have to watch carefully, for the people are seditious. Have you ever seen or heard anything of Me that looks like an attack on your authority? Have you anything of your own knowledge that would lead you to bring a charge against Me?”

Pilate, knowing nothing whatever against Him, and indeed scorning the idea that he knew anything about the Jewish people, whom he detested, replied haughtily, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and your own rulers have brought this charge against you, not I.” A great point was gained when Pilate said this, the charge was shown to be a mere invention, since the eagle eye of the Roman procurator had never seen the slightest grounds for it.

It was a frivolous charge on the very face of it. How could that harmless, forsaken man be a peril to Caesar? What had the Roman legions to fear from that solitary sufferer? He was too meek and pure to threaten warfare and strife in the domain of Tiberius. Look at Him, and realize the absurdity of the situation. Moreover, it would seem a strange thing that the Jewish people should bring before the Roman governor their own king. Is this the way that subjects treat their monarchs? If He be a leader of sedition He does not seem to have succeeded with His countrymen, for the heads of the people are seeking His death. There could be upon the face of it no chance of danger whatever from rebellion which was so summarily put down by

the Jews themselves. If they had not been besotted by their rage, they would themselves have shrunk from so absurd a position.

But yet I want you to note very carefully that *the Lord never denied this charge* in the sense in which He chose to understand it. He first explained what He meant by His being a king, and when He had explained it then He openly confessed that it was even so.

First, I say, *He explained what He meant by being a king*, and notice carefully that He did not explain it away. He said, “My kingdom,” and also when Pilate said, “Are you a king then?” He said, “You say that I am a king.” He was there and then a real king, and He avowed it without reserve. We are constantly told that the kingdom of Christ is a spiritual kingdom, and this saying is true, but I would have you take heed that you do not spirit away His kingdom as if it were only a pious dream.

Spiritual or not, the kingdom of Christ on earth is real and powerful. It is real none the less, but all the more, because it may fitly be called spiritual. Jesus is even now a king. He said, “I am a king.” Some say that His kingdom is not yet, but is reserved for the latter days, but I aver that He is a king today, and that even now JEHOVAH has set Him as king upon the holy hill of Zion. I bless God that He has translated us, “Into the kingdom of his dear Son.” “You are the king of glory, O Christ.” When I say, “Your kingdom come,” I do not mean that it may begin to be set up on earth, but that it may continue to be set up in new places, may be extended and grow, for Jesus has at this very moment a kingdom upon the face of the earth, and they that know the truth belong to it, and recognize Him as the royal witness by whom the kingdom of truth has been founded and maintained.

You remember the remarkable saying which is attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte in his later days at St. Helena, “I have founded a kingdom by force, and it has passed away; but Jesus

founded His empire upon love, and therefore it will last forever.” Verily, Napoleon spoke the truth—Jesus, the right royal Jesus, is Master of innumerable hearts today. The world knows Him not, but yet He has a kingdom in it which shall ere long break in pieces all other kingdoms. True and loyal hearts are to be found among the sons of men, and in them His name still wakes enthusiasm, so that for Him they are prepared to live and die.

Our Lord is every inch a king, He has His throne of grace, has His scepter of truth, His officers who, like Himself, witness to the truth, and His armies of warriors who wrestle not with flesh and blood, and use no carnal weapons, but yet go forth conquering and to conquer. Our Lord has His palace where He dwells, His chariot in which He rides, His revenues, though they be not treasures of gold and silver, and His proclamations, which are law in His church. His reigning power affects the destiny of the world at this present moment far more than the counsels of the five great powers, by the preaching of the truth His servants shape the ages, and set up and cast down the thrones of earth. There is no prince so powerful as Jesus and no empire so mighty as the kingdom of heaven.

Our Lord also said that His kingdom came not from this world, for that, I take it, is the more correct translation of the passage, “My kingdom is not of this world.” It came not from this world, it is a substantial kingdom, but it did not spring from the same sources as the kingdoms of the world, neither is it supported, maintained, or increased by the same power as that which the kingdoms of the world depend upon. Christ’s kingdom does not depend upon the force of arms, He would have His followers lay these weapons all aside. Christ’s kingdom does not depend, as earthly kingdoms too often do, upon craft, policy, and duplicity.

It used to be said that an ambassador was a gentleman who was sent abroad to lie for the good of his country, and I fear it might still describe full many an ambassador. What is the science of diplomacy but the art of deceit? When statesmen are thoroughly honest, and are guided by principle, they are generally suspected, and an outcry is raised that the interests of the country will be sacrificed. But there is no diplomacy in Christ's rule, everything like crooked policy is of the devil, and not of Christ. He comes to bear witness to the truth, and it is by the truth, not by force nor by craft, that His throne is established among the sons of men, and therefore it is not from this world.

To be a king is indeed so little wrong in the sight of Jesus that it is the ultimate purpose of His coming to earth. He came to save men, did He not? Yes, but still He says, "For this purpose was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth," which is another way of saying, "that I might be a king." This is His ultimatum. Christ is a teacher that He may be a king, Christ is an exemplar that He may be a king, Christ is a Savior that He may be a king, this is the great end and objective that He has in His life, His death, His resurrection, and His second coming—that He may set up a kingdom among the sons of men to the glory of God. Oh that this great objective of His mission might be furthered in our time, and consummated speedily in the long-promised age of gold.

The Master tells us that the main force and power of His kingdom lies in the truth. He came to be a King, but where is His scepter? The truth. Where is His sword? It comes out of His mouth, He bears witness to the truth. Where are His soldiers? They are men of truth. Jesus Christ leads on a band of whom He says, "And you are my witnesses." His kingdom consists in witnessing to the truth, and who are they that

become His subjects? Why, those that are of the truth, men who, hearing the truth, know the joyful sound and accept it, and feel its power.

Dear hearers, let each one of us ask himself, “Do I belong to His kingdom? Will I have this man to reign over me? Do I desire to get rid of everything in myself that is not true? Am I anxious to put down around me everything that is false and wicked? Do I wish to uphold God’s laws, for they are truth? Do I desire to spread the principles of love and kindness, for they are truth? Am I willing to learn, and so become the disciple of the greatest of all teachers, and then, am I willing to bear witness to what I have learned, and so spread the sway of the truth? If so, then I am of His kingdom.

I know that I address many who desire in their hearts today that Christ and His truth may triumph, and they little mind what becomes of themselves. Let but His gospel spread and the principles of righteousness prevail, and as for us, let us live or die, it shall be a matter of small concern. O King, live forever, and we shall find our life in Your life, and glory in promoting Your glory, world without end. Such a spirit is of the truth, and we may assure ourselves that Jesus is our King.

Our Lord, having explained His meaning, confessed that He was a King. This is that to which Paul refers when he says, “The Lord Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession.” He did not draw back and say, “I am no King.” Pilate might have delivered Him then, but He spoke boldly concerning His blessed, mysterious, and wonderful kingdom, and therefore it was not possible that He should be set free. This, indeed, was His accusation written over His cross, “This is Jesus the King of the Jews.”

Poor Pilate, he did not understand our Lord, even as the men of this world understand not the kingdom of Christ. He said to Him, “What is truth?” and without waiting for a reply

he went out to the Jews. Ah, brethren, let us never ourselves deny that Jesus is a king, but we shall deny it if we do not live according to His bidding. Oh you that claim to be Christ's, but do not live according to Christ's laws, you practically deny that He is a king.

I dread the men who say, "We believe, and therefore we are saved," and then do not live in holiness, for these divide our Lord's offices, setting up His priesthood and denying His kingship. Half a Christ is no Christ—a Christ who is a priest but never a king is not the Christ of God. Oh brethren, live as those who feel that every word of Jesus is law, and that you must do what He bids you, as He bids you, and because He bids you, and so let all men know that unto you Jesus is both Lord and God.

III. I conclude by noticing **THE ACQUITTAL** which Pilate gave to our Lord Jesus.

He had heard the charge of being a malefactor, to which the prisoner pleaded nothing, he had heard the charge of his being a king, which the prisoner had most satisfactorily explained, and now Pilate coming out to the people said, "I find in Him no fault at all." Pilate, you have well spoken. Your verdict is typical of the verdict of all who have ever *examined* Christ.

Some have examined Him with an unfriendly eye, but in proportion as they have been candid in the observation of facts, they have been struck with His life and spirit. It is a very rare thing to hear even the infidel rail at the character of Jesus, in fact, some of the foremost skeptics as to our Lord's teaching have been remarkably impressed with admiration of His life. No character like that of Jesus is to be seen in history, nay not even in romance.

If anyone says the four gospels are forgeries, let him try to write a fifth, which shall be like the other four. Why, you cannot

add an incident to the life of Christ, its details are unique, the fancy cannot imagine a fresh incident which could be safely joined on to that which is recorded. Every critic would cry out, "This is not genuine." The life of Jesus is a roll of cloth of gold, of the manufacture of which the art is utterly lost. His spotless character stands alone and by itself, and all true critics are compelled to say they find no fault at all in Him.

Let me add that this verdict of Pilate is the verdict of all that have ever *associated* with Christ. One disciple who was with Christ betrayed Him, but he spoke nothing against Him. Nay, the last witness of Judas before he hanged himself was this, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." If there had been a fault in Jesus, the traitor would have spied it out, his unquiet conscience would have been glad enough to find therein a sedative, but even he was compelled to say, "I have betrayed the innocent blood." "Which of you convinces me of sin?" is the challenge of Jesus, to which there is no reply.

Some of us have *lived with Christ spiritually*. In the course of His providence He has brought some of us very low by sickness, or by bereavement, or loss. Everyone saved by our Lord has come under the discipline of His house, for "whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

Now, what is the verdict of all here present who know Jesus, our king? For my part, I find no fault at all in Him. He is everything that is lovely. He is all my salvation and all my desire. Do you not think that out of the millions of Christians who have lived hoping in Christ someone would have told us if it is His habit to disappoint His people? Out of so many believers who dwell with Him surely some one or other of them, when they came to die, would have told us if He is not all that He professes to be. Would not someone or other have confessed, "I trusted in Christ and He has not delivered me, it is all a delusion"? Surely, out of the many we have seen depart, we

would have found some one or two that would have let out the secret, and have said, “He is a deceiver. He cannot save, He cannot help, He cannot deliver.” But never one dying believer throughout the ages has spoken ill of Him, but all have said, “We find no fault at all in Him.”

Mark you that will be the verdict of everyone among you. If any of you reject Christ, when you shall stand at His judgment seat to be condemned because you believe not in Him, and when that withering word, “Depart, you cursed!” shall consign you to your everlasting portion, you shall then be obliged to say, “I find no fault at all *in him*.” There was no failure in His blood, the failure was in my want of faith, no failure in His Spirit—the failure was in my obstinate will, no failure in His promise—the failure was that I would not receive Him, there was no fault at all in Him. He never spurned me. He never refused to hear my prayers. If my Sabbaths were wasted, it was no fault of His, if I defied the gospel, it was no fault of His, if I have perished, my blood is at my own door. “I find no fault at all in him.” From all parts of creation shall go up one general attestation to His perfection. Heaven and earth and hell shall all join the common verdict, “We find no fault at all in him.”

I will send you away when I give you three practical words to think of. The first is this—Beware of an external religion, for the men that called Jesus malefactor and falsely accused Him were very religious people, and would not go into Pilate’s hall for fear of polluting themselves. They were strong in rituals, but weak in morals. None are so inveterate against the principles of the Gospel as those whose religion consists in form and ceremony but does not affect their hearts.

I charge you rend your hearts and not your garments. Follow Christ spiritually, follow Christ in your very souls, or else sacraments will be your ruin, and even in trying to keep

yourselves from ceremonial defilement you will be defiling yourselves with hypocrisy.

The next thing is to charge you, dear friends, and to charge myself also, to shun all proud worldliness like that of Pilate. Pilate treats the whole matter cavalierly, he is a proud and haughty Roman, he hates the people whom he governs, and though he has a conscience, and at first he shows a tenderness towards his prisoner, yet his chief end and aim was to keep his office and amass money, and therefore innocent blood must be spilt. He must please the Jews, even if he murders the “Just One.”

This selfish worldliness in which a man makes his gold and himself his god always treats religion with contempt. The man minds the main chance, and sneeringly cries, “What is truth?” He knows what money is and what power is, but what is truth? It is a dream, a folly to him, and he despises it. There are persons around us now, clever time-serving men, with grand notions of their own abilities, and to them Jesus and His Gospel are matters for old women, servant girls, and what they call a Puritan crew.

Such topics are not for gentlemen of thought, culture, and understanding, like their high and mighty selves. “What is truth?” say they. They are rather favorably inclined to religion, that is to say, they do not persecute, but they despise, which in some respects is worse. They say, “We are agnostics, we have no particular views, we are large-hearted, and let every man think as he chooses, but still there is nothing in it, it is all matter of opinion. One man says this is the truth, and another says that is the truth, and how are we to know? The fact is, there is no such thing as fixed truth at all.

“For differing creeds let graceless zealots fight;
He can't be wrong whose life is in the right.”

This is this great man's conclusion of the matter, and yet it so happens that this gentleman's life is not in the right at all, and therefore on his own showing he has not much joy of his pretty rhyme. I think I see him as he turns on his heels with, "What is truth?" Let him be a warning to you. Come not near to such arrogant trifling. Be always foolish enough to be willing to judge candidly. Be so little clever as to be willing still to learn. Be so little certain of your own infallibility that you will at least hear reason, and will inquire whether these things be so. Alas, I fear that through worldly pride many will have it said of them, as it is said of the Roman governor every day in the creed, "Suffered under Pontius Pilate." Oh, how many times has Christ suffered under just such people as Pontius Pilate!

Last of all, let us all submit ourselves to Jesus our King. Wayworn and weary, emaciated and broken down, with His face more marred than that of any man, yet let us bow before Him and say, "All hail, You King of the Jews. You are our King forever and ever." If we are willing thus to acknowledge Him as our King in His shame and derision, He will by and by honor us when He comes in the glory of the Father, and all His holy angels with Him. Then shall He cause it to be seen that He has made us who follow Him to be kings and priests unto God, and we shall reign with Him forever and ever. Amen.

1645 CHRIST BEFORE HEROD – LUKE 23:8-9

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, February 19, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad: for he was desirous to see Him of a long season, because he had heard many things of Him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him. Then he questioned with Him in many words; but He answered him nothing. — Luke 23:8-9

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Luke 23:4-15; Proverbs 8]

AFTER PILATE HAD DECLARED to the chief priests and scribes that he found no fault at all in Jesus, they were afraid that their victim would escape, and therefore their fury was raised to the highest pitch, and they cried out the more vehemently against Him. In the course of their outcries they made use of the word, “Galilee,” going, as it seems to me, a little out of their way in order to drag in the name, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place.” Galilee was a region held in very great contempt, and they mentioned it to cast a slur upon our Lord, as if He were a mere boor from among the clowns of Galilee. To Pilate they thought that the mention of the name would, perhaps, act like the proverbial red rag held before an infuriated bull, for he appears to have been troubled by seditious persons from that province. We all remember that they were Galileans

whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. The Galileans were reputed to be an ignorant people, apt to be led astray by impostors, and so enthusiastic that they ventured their lives against the Romans. The priests would not only cast contempt upon Jesus, whom they were known to call the Galilean, but also excite the prejudices of Pilate, so that he might condemn Him to die as one of a nest of rebels.

They were mistaken, however, in the consequences of their device, for Pilate caught at the word, “Galilee,” directly. That province was not immediately under his rule, it was under the sway of the tetrarch Herod Antipas, and therefore he thought within himself, “I can kill two birds with one stone, I can get rid of this troublesome business by sending this prisoner to Herod, and I can also greatly gratify the king by showing him this attention.” Pilate had quarreled with Herod, and now for some purpose of his own he resolved to patch up a friendship by pretending great deference to his sovereign powers by sending one of his subjects to be tried by him. Pilate, therefore, asked, “Is this man a Galilean?” and when they told him that He was—for He was so by repute, His birth at Bethlehem having been willfully ignored—then Pilate at once commanded that He be led to Herod, for Herod was in his palace at Jerusalem attending the Passover festival.

See, then, my brethren, our divine Master conducted in His third march of sorrow through Jerusalem. First, He was led from the garden to the house of Annas, then He was conducted through the streets from the hall of Caiaphas to the judgment hall of Pilate, and now by Pilate’s orders He is led a third time by the angry crowd of priests through the streets to the palace of Herod, there to await His fourth examination. Certain of the old writers delight to remark that as there were four evangelists to do honor to our Lord, so were there four judges to do Him shame, Annas and Caiaphas, Pilate and Herod. We are on safer

ground when we observe with the early church the coalition of the heathen and the Jews, “For of a truth against Your holy child Jesus, whom You have anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatever Your hand and Your counsel determined before to be done.”

This morning I shall endeavor to set forth this portion of the sad narrative under two heads, which will be these, *Herod before Jesus*, and *Jesus before Herod*.

I. I call your attention first to **HEROD BEFORE JESUS**, because you must know something of his character, something of the meaning of his questions, before you can rightly understand the sorrow which they caused Jesus our Lord and Master.

This Herod Antipas was the son of the old Herod the Great, who had put to death the babes at Bethlehem in the hope of destroying the King of the Jews. He was a chip off the old block, but still he was several degrees baser than his father. There was nothing of the grandeur of his father about him. There was the same evil disposition without the courage and the decision. He did not in some things out-Herod Herod, for in certain points he was a more despicable person. Herod the Great may be called a lion, but our Lord very descriptively called this lesser Herod a fox, saying, “Go and tell this fox.” He was a man of dissolute habits and frivolous mind. He was very much under the sway of a wicked woman, who destroyed any little good there might have been in him. He was a lover of pleasure, a lover of himself, depraved, weak, and trifling to the last degree. I almost object to call him a man, therefore let him only be called a tetrarch.

This petty tetrarch had once been the subject of religious impressions. These Herods all more or less felt the influence of religion at times, though they were by no means benefited

thereby. The impressions made upon his conscience by John did not last with Herod. They were at first powerful and practical, for we are informed that, "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and holy, and observed him, and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly." I suppose he reformed many matters in his kingdom, and cast off perhaps some of his grosser vices. But when at last John began to denounce him for having taken his brother's wife to be his paramour, while yet the brother lived, he cast his reprover into prison. And then you remember how, with reluctance, Herod, to please his mistress, beheaded John in prison. Mark this, probably there is no more dangerous character living than a man who has once come under religious influences so as to be materially affected by them, and yet has broken loose and cast off all fear of God. He has done despite to his conscience so violently that from now on he will know few qualms. In such a man is fulfilled the saying of our Lord, "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walks through dry places, seeking rest and finds none. Then he says, I will return into my house from where I came out; and when he is come, he finds it empty, swept and garnished. Then goes he, and takes with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first." The mind of Herod Antipas was in the condition of the chamber which has been swept and garnished, for his life had been somewhat reformed, but the unclean spirit with the terrible seven had come back to his old den and now he was a worse man by a great deal than he had ever been before. The dog returned to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. This Herod was an Idumaean, that is to say, one of the descendants of Esau, an Edomite, and though he had professedly become a Jew, yet the old blood was in him, as it is written concerning Edom, "He

did pursue his brother with the sword, and cast off all pity.” The true Jacob stood before one of the seed of Esau, a tetrarch, profane and worldly like his ancestor, and scant was the pity which He received. Esau was descended from Abraham according to the flesh, but with Jacob was the covenant according to the spirit. It bodes no good to the spiritual seed when it comes, even for a moment, under the power of the carnal seed. We see how the child of the flesh takes to mocking, while the child according to promise is called to patience.

Herod was in such a state of mind that he furnishes me with a typical character which I would use for the instruction and admonition of you all. He is a type of some who frequently come to this Tabernacle, and go to other places of worship occasionally—people who were once under religious impressions, and cannot forget that they were so, but who will never be under any religious impressions again. They are now hardened into vain curiosity. They wish to know about everything that is going on in the church and kingdom of Christ, but they are far enough from caring to become part and parcel of it themselves. They are possessed with an idle curiosity which would lift the golden lid of the ark, and intrude behind the veil. They like to gather together all the absurd stories which are told about ministers, and to recount all the odd remarks that were ever made by preachers for centuries. All the gossip of the churches is sure to be known to them, for they eat up the sins of God's people as they eat bread. It is not likely that their knowledge of religious things will be of any use to them, but they are always eager after it. The church of God is their lounge, divine service is their theater, ministers are to them as actors, and the gospel itself, so much play-house property. They are a sort of religious Athenians, spending their time in nothing else than in hearing some new thing, hoping that perhaps some singular and unexpected discourse may be delivered in their

hearing which they can recount in the next company where they would raise a laugh. To them preaching is all a farce, and worked up with a few falsehoods of their own, it makes excellent fun for them, and causes them to be regarded as amusing fellows. Let them look at Herod, and see in him their leader, the type of what they really are or may soon become.

First, let us see *idle curiosity at its best*. Look here, sirs, and then look in a glass and trace the likeness.

To begin with, we find that Herod's curiosity had been created in him by his having heard many things concerning Jesus. How did he come to hear of Him? His great deeds were common talk; all Jerusalem rang with the news of His miracles and wondrous words. Herod, a convert to the Jewish faith, such as he was, took interest in anything that was going on among the Jews, and all the more so if it touched upon the kingdom, for the jealousy which set his father in a rage was not altogether absent in his son. No doubt also he had heard of Christ from John. John would not long have preached to Herod without using his own grand text, "Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world." I am sure that, though he was a preacher of righteousness, he had not left off being the herald of the coming Savior, and so from the stern lips of the great Baptist, Herod had heard concerning the King of the Jews, and something concerning His kingdom. When John was dead Herod heard still more of Christ, so that astonished with what was being done, he said, "This is John the Baptist whom I have beheaded: he is risen from the dead." Jesus became a kind of nightmare to his conscience. He was disturbed and alarmed by what he heard that the prophet of Nazareth was doing. Besides that, there was one in his household who doubtless knew a great deal about the Savior, for in Herod's court was the husband of a woman who ministered unto the Lord of her substance. The lady's name

was Joanna, and her husband was Chuza, Herod's steward—I suppose Herod's butler and manager of his household. From Chuza he could readily have learned concerning Jesus, and we may be sure that he would inquire, for the fear of the great prophet was upon him. Thus Herod's curiosity had been excited about our Lord Jesus Christ for a considerable time, and he longed to see Him. I am not sorry when this happens to any of my hearers. I am right glad that they should hear something about the Lord from His friends, something about Him from His ministers, and from those of us whose highest glory it is that, though we are not worthy to unloose the laces of His shoes, yet it is all our business here below to cry, "Behold the Lamb!" So these rumors, this talk, these admonitions, had begotten in Herod's mind the desire that his eyes should light on Jesus, so far, so good. Often men at this day come up to the house of prayer that they may hear the preacher, not because they want to be converted, not because they have any idea of ever becoming followers of Jesus, but because they have heard something about true religion which excites their curiosity, and they want to know what it is all about. They are fond of curiosities of literature, and so they would study curiosities of religion, oddities of oratory, and things remarkable of a theological kind.

It is said of Herod, in consequence of this curiosity that he rejoiced to see Jesus. It is said that he was, "exceedingly glad." What a hopeful state to be in! May we not expect great things when a man sees Jesus and is exceedingly glad? As I read this passage to myself, I thought, why, the language might well describe a child of God. Our text might fitly be spoken concerning ourselves. Let me read it line by line, and remark upon it. "When Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad." So were the apostles when Jesus manifested Himself to them, for it is written, "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the

Lord.” What other sight could bring to a true believer such joy? “For he was desirous to see Him.” Are we not? Are not all His people longing for that blessed vision which will make their heaven throughout eternity? “For he was desirous to see Him for a long season.” This is also true of us, our hearts are weary with watching, and our eyes fail for the sight of His face. “Why does He tarry?” we cry. “Make haste, my beloved, and be You like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of spices.” “Because he had heard many things of Him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him.” This, also, is our hope; we would both see and feel some gracious miracle, upon our eyes, that they may be opened, or upon our hands, that we may have greater power in the Master’s work, or upon our feet, that we may run in the ways of obedience. And especially upon our hearts, that we may be always soft and tender, pure and gracious, to feel the mind of God. Yes, these words read very prettily, indeed, but yet, you see, the meaning was not the high and spiritual one which we could put into them, but the low and groveling one, which was all that Herod could reach. He was “exceedingly glad,” but it was a frivolous gladness, because he hoped that now his curiosity would be satisfied. He had Jesus in his power, and he hoped now to hear some of the oratory of the prophet of whom men said, “Never man spoke like this man.” He hoped to see Him work a miracle, even He, of whom the record was, “He has done all things well.” Could not the great prophet be induced to multiply loaves and fishes? Might he not persuade Him to heal a blind beggar, or make a lame man leap as a hart? Would not a miracle make rare mirth in Herod’s palace, and cause a new sensation in the mind of the worn-out debauchee? If, for instance, a corpse were dug up, and Jesus would restore it to life, it would be something to tell when next the king sat down to a drinking bout with Herodias and her like. When each was trying to exceed the other in telling

strange tales, Herod would top them all! In this style many people come to hear the gospel. They want to have an anecdote of their own about a notorious preacher, and if they do see something ludicrous, or hear something striking, they will invent a tale, and swear that they heard it and saw it, though the lie might well choke them. They act thus because they come to hear for nothing but to feed their hungry curiosity. None carry this to such an extreme as those who did at one time feel a measure of the power of the word of God, but have shaken it off. These are the mockers whose bands are made strong. These are the idlers who turn even the testimony of the Lord into food for mirth. Still, at the first blush, there is something that looks very hopeful about them, and we are pleased that they exhibit such gladness when Christ is set forth before them.

One ill sign about Herod was the fact that his conscience had gone to sleep after having for a while troubled him. For a little while he had been afraid of Jesus, and trembled lest John had risen from the dead, but that fear had subsided, and superstition had given way before his Sadducean skepticism. He hoped that Jesus would perform some wonderful thing in his presence, but he had lost all dread of the Just and Holy One. He was a man of vain mind, the man whom he feared one day, he murdered the next, and He whom he welcomed with gladness he hurried off with derision. There was left to Herod no feeling towards Jesus but the craving after something new, the desire to be astonished, the wish to be amused. I think I see him now, sitting on his throne, expectant of wonders, like the trifler that he was. "Now we shall see," he says, "now we shall see what we shall see! Perhaps He will deliver Himself by sheer force, if He walked the sea He will probably fly away in the air. Perhaps He will render Himself invisible, and so pass away through the midst of the chief priests. I have heard that many a time when they would have stoned Him or cast Him down

from the brow of a hill, He departed, gliding through their midst, perhaps He will do the same this morning.” There sits the cunning prince, thinking what the wonder will be, regarding even displays of divine power as mere showman’s tricks, or magician’s illusions.

When Jesus was set before Him, he began to ask Him questions. “Then he questioned Him in many words.” I am glad the questions are not recorded. They could have done us no good, and besides, our modern Herods nowadays are great masters of the art, and need not that any man teaches them. We need not to be furnished with the old-fashioned quibbles and questions, for the supply is quite equal to our requirements. Fools can ask more questions in ten minutes than wise men are able to answer in fifty years. I say we do not need the old questions, but I daresay they would run somewhat in this line, “Are You that King of the Jews whom my father strove to slay? How came You to be a Nazarene? Have You been a miracle worker, or is it all slight of hand and black magic? John told me something about You, did You deceive him, or is it true? Have you raised the dead? Can you heal the sick?” Trying all the while to excite Him to work a miracle, he raised doubts and chopped logic fluently, for the text suggestively mentions his, “many words.” The curious in religion are generally very apt at asking questions, not that they want Christ, not that they want heaven, not that they want pardon of sin, not that they want any good thing, but still they would like to know everything that is dark and mysterious in theology. They would like to have a list of the difficulties of belief, a catalog of the curiosities of spiritual experience. Some men collect ferns, others are learned upon beetles, but these persons pry into church life, its doctrines, pursuits, aims, and infirmities—especially the latter. They could write a book upon orthodox England and unorthodox England, and dwell with unction upon mental peculiarities. It furnishes

them with something new, and adds to their store of information, and so they spare no prying questions, for they would analyze manna from heaven, and distil the tears of Christ, nothing is sacred to them, they put Scripture on the rack, and quibble at the words of the Holy Spirit.

I have thus set forth idle curiosity in its better stage. Now let us pass on and see how Jesus treated this curiosity, considering it under the head of **IDLE CURIOSITY DISAPPOINTED**. “He questioned Him in many words, but He answered him nothing!” If Herod had wanted to believe, Jesus would have been ready enough to instruct, if Herod had possessed a broken heart, Jesus would have hastened with tender words to bind it up, if Herod had been a candid inquirer if his doubts had been sincere and true, the faithful and true Witness, the Prince of the kings of the earth, would have been delighted to speak with him. But Jesus knew that Herod would not believe in Him and would not take up his cross and follow Him, and therefore He would not waste words on a heartless, soulless degenerate. Had He not said to His own disciples, “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast you your pearls before swine”? He saw in this man one so mean, cunning, cowardly, and heartless, that He viewed him as a fox to be let alone rather than a lost sheep to be sought after. He was a tree twice dead, and plucked up by the roots. All the Master did was to maintain an absolute silence in his presence, and let him question as he might, “He answered him nothing.”

Observe, my brethren, that our Lord Jesus Christ came not into this world to be a performer. He did not leave His glory to earn the approval of men. And as Herod regarded Him as a mere wonderworker, and would have turned his court into a theater where Jesus would be the chief actor, our Lord very wisely held His peace and did nothing at all. And sometimes His ministers might be wise if they were silent too. If they know

that men have no desire to learn, no spiritual wish or aspiration, I say they might be wise if they held their tongue altogether. I have sometimes admired George Fox, who, on one occasion, when the crowd had gathered round him, expecting him to deliver some fiery address, stood still by the space of two hours while they clamored that he should speak. Never a word did they get from him. He said he would famish them of words, for words were all they wanted, and not the power of the Spirit. Probably they remembered his silence better than they would have remembered his most vehement discourse. Sometimes silence is all that men deserve, and the only thing which in any probability will impress them. As the Lord Jesus was no performer, He did not gratify Herod, but answered him not a word.

Moreover, be it remembered that Herod had already silenced the Voice, and no marvel that he could not hear the Word. For what was John? He said, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.” What was Jesus but the Word? He that silences the Voice may well be denied the Word. Had not his shallow soul been moved—I was about to say, to its depths, such depths as they were? Had he not been admonished by one of the greatest of the children of men? For among them that were born of women, there had not then been a greater, than John the Baptist. Had not a burning and shining light shone right into his very eyes? And if he refused to hear the greatest of the sons of men, and to see the brightest light that God had then kindled, it was but right that the Savior should refuse him even a ray of light, and let him perish in the darkness which he had himself created. Ah, sirs, you cannot trifle with religious impressions with impunity. God thinks it no trifle. He, who has once been moved in his soul and has put away the heavenly word from him, may fear that it will be said of him, “My Spirit shall not always strive with man. Ephraim is joined to idols: let

him alone.” May not some conscience here, if it has but a little life in it, be alarmed at the memory of former rejections of the gospel, frequent quenching of the Spirit, and repeated trampling upon the blood of Jesus? If God never speaks to you again in the way of mercy, you have no right to expect that He should do so. And if from this day to the Day of Judgment the Lord should never give you another word of mercy, who shall say that you have been treated harshly? Have you not deserved it at His hands as Herod had done?

Furthermore, remember that Herod might have heard Christ hundreds of times before if he had chosen to do so. Jesus was always to be found by those who desired to listen to Him. He did not go sneaking about Galilee, or holding secret conventicles in holes and corners. He always spoke in the synagogue, and Herod might have gone there. He spoke in the street or by the seashore, or on the mountain side and Herod might have gone there. Jesus stood out boldly before the people, and His teaching was public and free, if Herod had wished to hear Him, he might have done so times beyond number. Therefore now, having despised all these opportunities, the Savior will not furnish Him with another, which he would have treated in the same manner. He answers him nothing, and by so doing answered him terribly. Beware how you use opportunities. Dear hearers, beware how you waste your Sabbaths. There may come a day when you would give a thousand worlds for another Sabbath, but it shall be denied you. There may come a day when you would count out all your wealth to have another invitation to Christ, but it will be denied you, for you must die, and the voice of mercy will never ring in your ears again. They, that will not when they may, shall not when they would. Many will knock after the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, but when He shuts no man opens. The door was shut on Herod.

Observe that our Master had good reason for refusing to speak to Herod this time, over and above what I have mentioned, because He would not have it supposed that He yielded to the pomp and dignity of men. Jesus never refused an answer to the question of a beggar, but He would not gratify the curiosity of a king. Herod dreams that he has a right to ask whatever impertinent questions he may choose to invent, but Jesus knows nothing of men's rights in such a matter, it is all grace with Him, and to Him the prince upon the throne is not an atom better than the peasant in the cottage. And so when Herod in all his pride and glory thinks full sure that Christ will pay deference to him, and perhaps will pay him court to win his favor, Jesus disregards him. He wants nothing of the murderer of John the Baptist. Had Herod been the poorest and most loathsome leper throughout all Judea, had he been the poorest beggar in the street, who was lame or blind, his voice would at once been heard by the Lord of mercy. But He will not answer the prince who hopes for homage at His hands, nor feed the idle wishes of a crafty reprobate. What favor did He need at Herod's hand? He had not come to be set free, He had come to die, and therefore His face is set like a flint, and with heroic courage, He answers him not a word.

Now, then, you have seen frivolous curiosity at its best, and you have seen it disappointed, as it generally is to this day. If people come to hear the gospel out of this frivolous curiosity, they usually retire saying, "Really, I do not see anything in it. We have heard nothing eloquent, nothing profound, and nothing outrageous." Just so, there is nothing in the gospel to please the luxurious, though everything to bless the poor. Jesus answered Herod nothing, and He will answer you nothing if you are of Herod's order. It is the doom of triflers that they should get no answer from the gospel. Neither the Scriptures,

nor the ministry, nor the Spirit of God, nor the Lord Jesus will speak with them.

What was the result of this disappointment upon Herod? *Idle curiosity curdles into derision.* He thinks Jesus is a fool, if not an idiot, and he says so, and begins to deride Him. With his men of war he mocks Him, and “set Him at naught,” which signifies to make nothing of Him. He calls his soldiers and says, “Look at this creature; He will not answer a word to what I have to say, is He bereft of His senses? Wake Him up and see.” Then they mock and laugh and jest and jeer. “Here,” says Herod, “He calls Himself a King! Bring out one of my shining white robes and put it on Him, we will make a king of Him.” So they put it about His blessed person, and again heap insults upon Him. Was it not strange— this decking Him in a gorgeous robe of dazzling white? The mediaeval writers delight to dwell on the fact that Herod arrayed our Lord in white and afterwards Pilate clothed Him in red. Is He not the Lily of the valley and the Rose of Sharon? Is He not matchlessly white for innocence, and then gloriously red in His atoning blood? Thus, in their very mockery, they are unconsciously setting forth to us both His spotless holiness and His majestic royalty. When they had insulted to their full, they sent Him back to Pilate, kicking Him from foot to foot at their pleasure, as if He were a football for their sport. Then our Lord made His fourth sorrowful march through the streets of the city over which He had wept.

That is what idlers in the long run do with Christ, in their disappointment they grow weary of Him and His gospel, and they cry, “Put Him away; there is nothing in Him, nothing of what we looked for, nothing to satisfy curiosity, nothing sensational; take Him away.” Away goes Jesus, never to return, and that is the end of Herod, and the end of a great many more.

II. My time is nearly gone, but bear with me while for a few minutes I try to set forth **JESUS IN THE PRESENCE OF**

HEROD. Although no blows are recorded, I greatly question whether our divine Master suffered anywhere more than He did in the palace of Herod. You and I, perhaps, apprehend most easily the woe of the coarser sufferings when they scourged Him and when they plaited the crown of thorns and put it upon His head. But the delicate and sensitive mind of our Master was, perhaps, more touched by what He suffered in the palace of Herod than by the rougher torture. For, first, here is a man fully in earnest for the salvation of our souls, and in the midst of His grievous passion He is looked upon as a charlatan and a mere performer who is expected to work a miracle for the amusement of an impious court. How it cuts an earnest man to the quick, when he finds that, let him do what he may, people do not sympathize with him in earnestness, but are coolly criticizing his style, or imitating his mannerisms, or admiring his expressions as matters of literary taste. It is heart-breaking when your ardor makes you self-forgetful to find others pecking at trifles, or making your efforts into a kind of show. The Christ must have been wounded in His very soul when He was treated as a mere performer, as if He had left the Father's bosom and was about to give Himself to death, and yet was aiming to amuse or to astonish. I know how it saddens my Lord's servants when they preach their very hearts out to bring men to repentance, and the only result is to elicit the remark that, "His arguments were very telling, and that pathetic passage was very fine." There is a thorn in such chill words to pierce deeper than the crown of thorns. Horrible indifference smites like the Roman scourge.

Then to think of our Lord's being questioned by such a fop as Herod! A man of earnest and intense soul, living for one thing only, and that the redemption of mankind, is here worried by the foolish questions of a man of the world. Were you ever in an agony of bodily pain yourself, and did some frivolous

person call upon you and begin to torture you with the most wicked nonsense and absurdities? Have you not felt that his chatter was worse than the pain? It must have been so with Jesus. When the ridiculous must question the sublime the result is misery. With the bloody sweat yet damp upon His brow, and with the accursed spit still defacing His blessed countenance, the Man of Sorrows must be tortured by the driveling of a heartless idler. With His heart all bowed down under a sense of the awful penalty of sin, the great Substitute for sinners must be molested by the petty small talk and vulgar jests of the meanest of mankind. Solving eternal problems, and building up an everlasting temple unto the living God, He must be twitted by a vainglorious tetrarch, tormented and tortured by foolish questions fit only to be asked of a charlatan. We think the cross itself was not a worse instrument of torture than the haughty tongue of this debauched monarch.

Then the vulgarity of the whole thing must have tortured our Lord. The whole of them gathered round about Him with their hoarse laughter and coarse jests. He has become a byword and a proverb to them. When you are merry you can enjoy merriment, but when the heart is sad laughter is wretchedly discordant, and embitters your grief. Now this one laughs, and then another sneers, while a third thrusts out the tongue, and they are all uproariously jovial. In harmony they are all making nothing of Him, though with awful earnestness He is lifting the world out of the slough of despair, and hanging it in its place, again among the stars of glory. Jesus was performing more than Herculean labors, and these little beings, like so many gnats and flies, were stinging Him. Small things are great at torturing, and these worthless beings did their utmost to torment our Lord. Oh, the torture of the Master's spirit!

Remember, it was no small sorrow to our Lord to be silent. You tell me that He appears majestic in His silence. It is so, but

the pain of it was acute. Can you speak well? Do you love to speak for the good of your fellow men, and do you know that when you speak, full often your words are spirit and life to those who hear you? It will be very hard to feel compelled to refuse them a good word. Do not imagine that the Lord despised Herod as Herod despised the Lord. Ah, no! The pity of His soul went out to this poor frivolous creature, which must make sport of the Savior's sufferings, and treat the Son of the Highest as though He were a court fool who must play before him. The Savior's infinite love was breaking His heart, for He longed to bless His persecutor, and yet He must not speak, nor give forth a warning word. True, there was little need for words, for His very presence was a sermon which ought to have melted a heart of stone, but yet it cost the Savior a mighty effort to keep down the floodgates and hold in the blessed torrents of His holy speech, which would have flowed out in compassionate pleading. Silent He must be, but the anguish of it I can scarcely tell. Sometimes to be permitted to speak a word is the greatest comfort you can have. Have you ever been in such a state that if you could cry out, it would have been a relief to you? What anguish, then, to be forced to be as a mute man! What woe to be forced to be silent with all these mockers about Him, and yet pitying them all! As a man might pity a moth that flies into the flame of the candle, and will not be delivered, so did our Lord, pity these creatures. How sad that they could make sport of their own damnation, fling the salvation of God to the ground, and tread it down as swine tread down their husks. Oh, it grieved the Master's heart; it moved His soul to its very center.

Think of the utter contempt that was poured upon Him. I do not judge that this was the bitterest of His woes, for their contempt was an honor to Him. But it was one ingredient of His cup of mingled wormwood and gall, that they should so

despise Him as to clothe Him in a white robe, and mock His kingship, when on that kingship their only hope was hung. They “set Him at naught,” that is, put Him down as nothing, jeered and jested at Him, and if there was nothing even about His manhood which they could respect, they invented ways by which they could pour scorn upon Him. Luke is the gospel of the man, if you want to read about Jesus in His manhood, read Luke, and there you will see how His very manhood was trampled in the mire by these inhuman creatures, who found their joy in despising Him.

See, then, your Lord and Master, and let me put two or three questions to you. Do you not think that this peculiar silence of Jesus was a part of His anguish, in which He was bearing the punishment for your sins of the tongue? Ah me, ah me! Redeemed of the Lord, how often have you misused your speech by wanton words! How often have we uttered murmuring words, proud words, false words, words of despite to holy things, and now our sins of the tongue are all coming upon Him, and He must stand silent and bear our penalty.

And is it not possible that when they put the gorgeous robe upon Him, He was bearing your sins of vanity, your sins of dress and pride, when you made yourselves glorious to behold, and arrayed yourselves in gorgeous robes and glittering apparel? Know you not that these things are your shame? For had you had no sin, you would have needed none of these poor rags, and may not the Christ in white and red be bearing your sins of folly? And do you not think that when they were making Him nothing, and despising Him, He was then bearing our sins, when we set Him at naught—our words of despite and derision, when, perhaps, in our ungodly days we, too, made sport of holy things, and jested at the word of God? Ah me, I think it was so, and I ask you to look at Him, and say as you see Him there, “It is not Herod after all, it is my tongue, my vanity, my trifling

with holy things, which caused Him this exquisite torture. Lord Jesus, substitute for me, let all these transgressions of mine be put away once and for all by Your meritorious passion.”

Finally, we read that Herod and Pilate were made friends from that day, and I do hope if there are any here that are true-hearted Christians, if they have had any ill-will towards one another, they will think it a great shame that Herod and Pilate should be friends, and that any two followers of Jesus should not be friends at the sight of the suffering Master. As for those two foxes, Pilate and Herod, they were tied tail to tail that day by our great Samson. Our Lord has often been a point of union for wicked men, not by His intent and purpose, but because they have joined together to oppose Him. I have often smiled in my heart to see how superstition and skepticism will march together when they are anxious to oppose the gospel. Then the Sadducee says, “Give me your hand, dear Pharisee. We have a common interest here, for this man would overturn us all.” The gospel is the mortal enemy both of the skeptical Sadducee and the superstitious Pharisee, and so they lay aside their differences to assail it. Now, then, if the wicked unite before our Lord Jesus when He wears the white robe, should not His people much more be united, especially when they remember that He said, “A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another.” I charge you by your homage to Him you call Master and Lord, if you have any difference of any sort with any Christian brother or sister, let not yon sun go down till you have ended it by hearty love for Jesus’ sake. Let it be seen that Christ is the great uniter of all those who are in Him. He would have us love one another even as He has loved us, and His prayer is that we may be one. May the Lord hear that prayer and make us one in Christ Jesus. Amen.

1646 A QUESTION AND ANSWER – JOHN 6:66-69

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Evening, February 5, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will you also go away? Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. — John 6:66-69

[Scripture Read before Sermon – John 6:47]

BRETHREN, WE BELIEVE that the righteous shall hold on his way, and he that has clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger. We also believe that he that believes in Christ “has everlasting life,” and consequently must live forever. The living water which Christ gives a man shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. Our Lord has said of His sheep that they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of His hands. Yet we know that if any man draws back the Lord will have no pleasure in him, and we are sure that, “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” Therefore we very heartily sing the verse in one of our hymns—

“We have no fear that You should lose
One whom eternal love could choose;

But we would never this grace abuse,
Let us not fall! Let us not fall!

We consider that it would be an abusing of this grace if we were to grow careless, presumptuous, high-minded, and imagine that for ourselves personally it would not be possible to become apostates, or even to turn aside a little from the right way. We believe the truth of the final perseverance of the saints concerning the true people of God, but the question comes to our heart, are we such? Is there in us the incorruptible seed which lives and abides forever? And how are we to know that we are such but by this very perseverance which, while it is an effect of grace, is also one of the most certain tokens of it, for there is not the true grace of God in the heart where there is no perseverance in grace even unto the end. “He that endures to the end shall be saved.” But what if we should only have the transient gleams of temporary illumination, and should relapse into a thick Egyptian night? Here is cause enough for holy fear.

Come, then, brethren, trusting in the immutable grace and love and power of God, let each man, nevertheless, examine himself, and let this be a time of heart-searching. Say not this is out of place when we are just gathering around the table of the Lord, for is it not written, “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread”? Let us get ready to come to the festival of our Lord’s Supper by putting our Lord’s question, each one to His own heart, and trying to answer it by the help of God’s own Spirit.

First, *the reason for the question*; why did Christ ask of the twelve, “Will you also go away?” Then, secondly, *the question itself*, and thirdly, *the answer which Peter most fitly gave to it*, which, I doubt not, he gave in the name and on the behalf of all his brethren. The same reply we would also give tonight— “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And

we believe and are sure that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

I. First, then, WHY DID THE SAVIOR ASK THE TWELVE THIS QUESTION? He would not have caused them needless pain. He had a wise reason for trying them with such an inquiry.

It was, first, because it was *a season of defection*. “From that time many went back, and walked no more with Him.” You will find, I think, that in all churches there are times of flocking in, when many fly to the church like doves to their windows. But happy is that church which never has a time of flying out, when numbers who have been tested fail, and are no more to be found. Churches have summers, like our gardens, and then all things are full, but then come their winters, and alas, what emptying is seen! Have we not all seen the flood when the tide has come up far upon the beach, and have we not all marked the ebb when every wave has seemed to fall short of that which preceded it? Such ebbs and floods there are in the history of the kingdom of Christ. One day, “The kingdom of God suffers violence and every man presses into it.” At another time men seem to be ashamed of the Christian faith, and they wander off into a thousand delusions, and the church is diminished and brought low by heresy, by worldliness, by lukewarmness, and by all sorts of evils. Often may the chronicle run thus, “Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled.” It is well, then, at times when those that did run well are hindered, that the Master should say to those who for a while remain steadfast, “Will you also go away?” Ah, dear friends, some of you are very steadfast now while this church flourishes, how would you be if the pastor were dead, or his name in ill-repute? How would you be if the attendance on the means of grace grew slack? How would you be if there was a decline in all the work of the church? Have you backbone enough in you to be faithful if all others were faithless? Is there the real grit about you? Could you dare to be

Daniels, and “dare to stand alone”? Can you fight a losing battle? Can you stand in the gap and be the last of a few heroic men who will defend the pass against all comers? Alas, what numbers swim with the tide! How few can swim against the current! How readily are men seized with panic, and run for it with might and main if they see others hastening from the battle. How few can hold the bridge like Horatius in the brave days of old! Well may the Savior ask the question of us tonight, for we are as frail and fickle as others. Well may He ask it *now*, for worse times than these may be drawing near, “Will you also go away?”

It was a time, too, of defection among disciples. I call your attention to the use of that word here. “From that time many of His *disciples* went back.” Disciples? Yes, not merely camp-followers, not the mob that hung upon His skirts for the sake of the loaves and fishes, but some of His disciples went back. Those of nobler spirit, who had listened to His words, and for a while had professed to call Him, “Master and Lord,” even some of these deserted the standard. Their name remains, they are called “disciples” still, though they have gone back. And this sets forth the grievous guilt of such men and women as enter into the church, and then after a while turn aside to false doctrine or to sin. They depart with their prince’s uniform upon their backs, and carry the livery of Christ into the service of Satan. The stamp of a disciple is upon each of them still, though they are renegades and perverts. They will be judged as having been what they professed to be, and heavy will be their sentence as apostates. We read of “Simon, the leper.” He is called “the leper” after He had been healed. Here on the other hand are some who bear their good name even after their villainy has been discovered, and this helps to make their treachery the more glaring.

Just as the name “harlot” stuck to Rahab after she had become an honest woman and a believer, so does a good name stick to one after it has ceased to be true, and it remains as a reminder of their fearful folly. Go and live down Turncoat Lane, hide yourself away as much as you can, but whenever you come into the street, if they do not say it to your face, the neighbors will whisper behind your back, “There goes one who was a disciple. There is one who professed to be a follower of Christ, but he has turned his back upon his Lord.” The memory of your profession will stick to you through life. It will stick to you throughout eternity. If you are a wolf in sheep’s clothing some flecks of the wool will hang about you long after you have dragged the fleece over your head. Damnable apostate shall be your brand, even when you are cast away from the face of God forever. Oh, that none of us might ever earn such a title, by being reckoned among the disciples that went back and walked no more with Jesus! Yet, when disciples fall away, it is time to ask other disciples, “Will you also go away?”

And *the defection in this case was on account of doctrine*. Our Savior had done nothing that could vex His followers; He had not even spoken sharply to His disciples. Far from it, He had simply preached the glorious truth that He is the food of the new-born life. But this they did not understand, and so they would listen no further and would not stay to ask an explanation. They went back at once, as if horrified at what they heard. The truth was too hard for them; it was not to be borne with. “It is a hard saying. Who can bear it?” A true disciple sits at the feet of his Master, and believes what he is told even when he cannot quite comprehend the meaning, or sees the reasons for what his Master utters. But these men had not the essential spirit of a disciple, and consequently, when their instructor began to unfold the innermost parts of the roll of truth, they would not listen to His reading of it. They would believe as far

as they could understand, but when they could not comprehend they turned on their heels and left the school of the Great Teacher. Besides, the Lord Jesus Christ had taught the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, and of the need of the Spirit of God, that men should be led to Him, “for Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray Him. And He said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it were given unto Him of my Father.” Here our Lord uttered a bit of the old-fashioned free grace doctrine, such as people nowadays do not like. They call it “Calvinism,” and put it aside among the old exploded tenets which this enlightened age knows nothing of. What right they have to ascribe to the Genevan reformer a doctrine old as the hills I do not know. But our Lord Jesus never hesitated to fling that truth into the face of His enemies. He told them, “You believe not, because you are not of My sheep, as I said unto you.” “No man can come to Me, except the Father which has sent Me draw Him.” Here He tells them plainly that they could not come unto Him unless the Father gave them the grace to come. This humbling doctrine they could not receive, and so they went aside. Now, when the truth itself becomes a stumbling block—when the gospel itself, which ought to draw men to heaven, becomes the reason why they go back, it is time for us to suspect ourselves, and to—

“Think we hear the Savior say,
Will you forsake Me too?”

“Will not you also be staggered? Will not some truth, stumble you? Will not some mystery of the kingdom of heaven make you also to be scandalized?” Blessed is the man that is not offended in Christ. Happy is he who lays aside his own wisdom to be taught of the Lord.

Further, it is worthy of notice that this question was put because many were not only going away from Christ, but *they were going back*. Read the words. They “*went back* and walked no more with Him.” They did not go off to the right or to the left, making some slight departure from the straight road, but they turned deliberately around and went back, reversing their course, and retracing their steps. Of course, in consequence of this, they were very soon what they used to be. The reclaimed drunk went back to his cups, the cups were soon full again, and he was soon wallowing in drink, like a sow in the mire. The man, who had lived a lascivious life, and for a time had cast it off to put on the garb of morality, went back, and you saw him once again in the house of the strange woman. “The dog has returned to his vomit.” The reformed liar was again false, the thief was again pilfering, and the swearer was again profane. They went back, like Pliable, who quit the Pilgrim Road, and returned to the City of Destruction. Now, it is really a dreadful thing, when men have seen the folly of their lives and have come out of it, for them to go back to their former habits. Well said the prophet, “Let them not turn again to folly.” But, alas, these burned children ran to the fire again. The silly moth makes another dash at the candle. They were well-nigh escaped, but they plunge again into the flood of iniquity. What is to become of them? Is not this the fear—that their last end shall be terrible, because of the violence done to conscience and to the word of the Lord? The evil spirit went out of them, and took his walks abroad, but soon he went back again and found the house empty, and swept, and garnished. He therefore takes unto himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and the last end of that man will be worse than the first. I should not have believed it, though a man had declared it to me, that such a one could go back, for he seemed so sick of sin, so wearied with its bondage. I could imagine that he might step

aside under a strong temptation, but to go back—how can that be? Why, this is the man who was converted from drunkenness, and delivered temperance lectures! Is he a drunk again? This is the man that had clean escaped from his former filthiness, and warned others! Is he wallowing in lust again? What a fool! What a multitude of fools in one is such a man! If his course was wise, why did he leave it? And if it were wise to leave it, why has he gone back to it? If it is right to go back to it, why did he not always continue in it? For this unmitigated folly his blood will be upon his own head. But when we see rational men act thus, even men of whom we hoped better things, we need not be surprised that we also are put to a stand with the personal question, “Will you also go away?”

In the case before us *the defection from Christ was open defection*, for we read, “They went back, and walked no more with Him.” They once walked with Jesus in the public streets, but now they will have no more to do with Christ. When Jesus preached—these constant hearers, where were they? When He worked a miracle—these admiring lookers-on, where were they? They had ministered to Him of their substance; no more supplies come from them. They had often asked Him to explain the word when He had spoken in public; they desire no more secret interviews. They had asked Him also to teach them how to pray. But they no longer care to be found upon their knees. They are not hypocrites enough to keep step with Him when their hearts are not with Him. They are, at least, decent enough to walk no more with Him now that they have gone back to their sins. Alas, we know some that, used to walk with Christ, who at this time walk no more with His people, for their hearts have gone away from Christ. The Sabbath is ignored, the house of God is forsaken, the Bible is put away, prayer is a thing neglected and perhaps despised. They walk no more with Christ, for they prefer a broader or a smoother road. If anybody mentions to

them what they used to be, they slink away, and seem to say, “Never mention it again. We wish it to be ignored.” I remember a household where the sons and daughters all professed to be converted to Christ, but some of the young people were fond of amusements that were not consistent with the profession of religion, and when they were found in such engagements, what did they do? Why, they blushed a little, but by and by, they boldly declared that they had never been converted—that they were forced into it by persuasion, and hurried on by excitement to do that which their better sense led them to regret. Their excuse was as false as their former profession. They knew that they acted of their own accord, and that they willingly professed Christ. Alas, just as willingly when they came in the way of temptation they forsook Him. Ah, apostate, it is all very well to say that you were persuaded, and all that, but you know that you did deliberately confess your faith, or you would never have been baptized by us. You did deliberately seek membership with the church of God, or you would not have been received, and on yourself must be the responsibility of it. If you have gone back from Christ you yourself must bear the shame in time and eternity. But when any do thus openly sever themselves from the companionship of the Crucified One, well may the question pass from heart to heart, “Will you also go away?”

Thus I have introduced the question by giving the reason for it.

II. Now, THE QUESTION ITSELF. The Master pressed it upon the disciples—“Will you also go away?”

He might well press the question, for *one of them would certainly do so*. He said, “I have chosen you twelve!” Not many—twelve. “I have chosen you,” a very prudent chooser, much better able to judge than any of His ministers. “I have chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil.” Are our pastors and

elders likely to make a better selection? Is it likely that the percentage of deceit is less among us than in the apostolic college? I would not like to say—it would be wrong to say—that one out of every twelve of church members is a Judas. What right, have I to say it? But if I were called upon to depose that I am certain that they are not, I dare not make so bold an assertion. I fear that the average of mankind in any place would in all probability be much the same as in our Lord's day, and possibly there may be a worse state of things in London than in Judea and Galilee. Still, if we conceive our case to be improved, yet a measure of danger exists. Is it true in the case of only one member of this church that he will betray Christ? If it is, then let the question begin at the pulpit, and go round to the youngest member, "Lord, is it I?"—a question suitable for this table, for at this table of fellowship it was asked by every one of the twelve, "Lord, is it I?" Certainly, some among us—someone among us—will deny or sell his Master. God grant it be not I! Let each one breathe that prayer.

Besides, the Master knew that *all of them might do so*. All of them might go away from Him, apart from His grace, indeed, all of them would. There stood Peter, this very Peter who gave such a bold answer to the question, and the Master knew that there was enough in Peter to have made him as faithless as Judas if it had not been for His upholding grace. Ah, brothers and sisters, when we see others fall today, let us say, "It may be my case tomorrow!" Is there not the same heart, the same nature, the same tendency to sin? Have we not the same weakness? Are we not exposed to the same temptations? Is there not the same devil craftily searching out our infirmities, that he may work upon them? Are we not all in danger? I fear that he is especially in jeopardy who will say tonight, "I am a man of experience. I am out of harm's way." If there is a brother among us who says, "These warnings are not meant for

me,” he is probably the man who will disgrace that holy name by which he is named. If there is a deacon, an elder, a grey-headed Christian man, a venerable, believing woman, who shall be saying, “I have nothing to fear from temptation. I have passed out of the realm of caution and watchfulness,” I stand in doubt of such. Confident friend, I fear that you are the man. This carnal confidence, this proud presumption as to yourself, should be a caution to you, for these things are the smoke, which denote a smoldering fire. “Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” The Master put the question, because He knew that it ought to come home to every heart among the twelve.

Moreover, He put the question to them because *if they turned aside it would be especially sad*. I do not read that Jesus said anything about those that had already gone back. He alludes to them by the use of the word “also,” but He does not seem to have run after them to beg them to return. He knew what they were, and knew that they were best apart from Him. When the chaff was blown away it was only the fulfillment of John the Baptist’s words, “His fan is in His hand and He shall thoroughly purge His floor,” so He suffered the chaff to go to its own place. But when the Master looked at the twelve, then He said with holy care and anxiety, “Will you? Will you also go away?” As much as to say, “If you go away who have been with Me from the beginning, who have been chosen by me to be eyewitnesses of My life, if you that have been near My inmost heart, and shared My trials and My joys—if you go away it will be sin indeed.” Friends, if any of *us* turn aside what excuse shall be made for us? I say deliberately that if I go away from my Master I can expect nothing but the hottest wrath of God forever. Unhappy, unhappy wretch, to have preached to such multitudes, if I deny my Lord! Condemned out of my own mouth a thousand times over! I shall be a mark for all the

arrows of vengeance. And what shall I say of my brethren behind me, the deacons and elders of this church? If they go away from Christ and forsake Him after their brave professions, who shall apologize for them? Many here are marked men and women. Your experience of Christ has been long, sweet, deep, remarkable, and you have spoken of it to others with much confidence and delight. If you go away you will deserve to be hung up like Haman, on the gallows, fifty cubits high—an exhibition of direct treachery and a monument of the awful wrath of God against such as trample on the blood of Christ. You will be sinners above all the sinners of yours time. Oh, may it never be, for if one of the twelve shall do it, it will be the greatest sin of all. It will grieve the heart of the Master, it will open the mouths of blasphemers, it will afflict the saints, it will disgrace the apostates, and bring down upon them infinite condemnation.

And yet, do you know, when others are turning aside, the question has to be asked, for *apostasy is very contagious*. We are called sheep, and it is of the nature of sheep that if one goes right the next will follow. But if they meet with a gap in the hedge and one leaps through it they will all follow the same road. When backsliding and apostasy become fashionable you may ask, even the twelve, “Will you also go away?” As I have seen, in my short experience, minister after minister turning aside to novelties of doctrine, and especially into the deep pit of modern thought, into which the abhorred of the Lord do fall, I have thought of one and of another, “Will you also go away?” As men that I have spoken with, and prayed with, and trusted in, have one by one apostatized from the faith of God’s elect, I have been staggered and astounded. Surely this fashionable sin has a fascinating influence over many minds, and would delude, if it were possible, the very elect. How few stand to the landmarks in this age of wandering! How few are

found approved in the day of trial! The question is one that must of necessity be pressed home, “Will you also go away?”

And to conclude this part of our subject, our Savior, I think, asks the question because *He wishes His following to be always perfectly voluntary*. We sometimes speak of “the sweet compulsions of grace.” But let it be always understood that this is by way of metaphor and figure, for none can truly walk with Jesus unwillingly. The lack of will would be fatal. There is an influence which the grace of God exerts upon the will, by which the unrenewed will is led captive, and yet as soon as it is a renewed will it becomes emphatically free. It ceases to be a will if it has no determining power, the grace of God gives it that power to a high degree. Those who truly follow Christ do not follow Him because they are forced to do so. Grace has no slaves. It rules a kingdom to which the Son has given true liberty. Christians are not dragged after Christ. They yield most sweetly to the charms of His love, to the force of the truth which He teaches, and the love which He manifests. They gladly serve their Lord and Master. Jesus seems to say, “If you do not serve Me so, you may go.” Will you go? Christ does not want anybody to profess to be a Christian who does not wish to be a Christian. He does not want one to come to this table because he thinks it to be a law, and a custom, by which he is bound. He wants you to come because you delight to do so. He does not desire any minister to preach the gospel because he is paid for it, or because he would lose prestige among godly people if he did not. He wants no slaves to grace His throne. The very charm of obedience is that it is rendered cheerfully. The very bliss of Christ's service is that we voluntarily, with all our heart and soul, take up his cross and follow Him. I am not denying the compulsions of grace. I am only saying that they are perfectly consistent with the absolute freedom of the gracious will. God treats men as men, and not as heaps of brick

and mortar. His grace displays itself in converting and changing them as men that have wills, and not as logs of wood which Solomon may cut and plane in the mountains without their consent. No, no, if you will to go, go, but if your will is to cling to Him, then will He give you grace to follow Him, even to the end.

I do not know whether I impress my congregation with a sense of the importance of the truths I am trying to press home, but I feel them myself. Oh, brethren, it is a very easy thing to gather a crowd of people, the difficulty is to hold together year after year those that profess to be converted. There is a constant winnowing going on in all churches, and this drives away the light and chaffy ones. There is a fan at work upon this floor. Some stay year after year, and yet turn out to be of no account. The Lord goes on sifting, but certain of the chaff do not blow off at first because, perhaps, the wheat is lying on top of it. There is a good wife or holy mother or a godly husband that keeps the doubtful ones right. When these are taken away, the next blast of the winnowing fan sweeps that bit of chaff away. Oh, be not as the chaff, which is covered up, and so hidden among the wheat. Turn not aside, I pray you. The Lord keep you. I shall reckon it to be a privilege to bury you rather than have to erase your name from our church roll for conduct inconsistent with your profession. May you gather around my corpse when God pleases to let me go home, and may you say, “He lived an honorable life, and died faithful to His Lord.” Yes, let that gathering be before another Sabbath dawns, if God so wills, rather than that I should live to dishonor the precious truth which I have preached, and turn aside from the Master whom I profess to love. What I say to myself I think I hear each one of you say to himself or herself, “Better far that we die than that we deny our Lord.”

III. I shall close with my third head, and consider **THE ANSWER WHICH QUICK-VOICED PETER GAVE**—the answer which I hope we are prepared to give to our divine Leader, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

It is threefold.

“Lord, to whom shall we go?” This is the first answer. Observe, that Peter does not appear to think it possible, or think it less than abominable, for a man to go back, for the natural answer to Peter’s question, “To whom shall we go?” is “Go back.” No, but Peter does not tolerate the idea of going back. I ask you, my beloved brother in Christ, can you tolerate it? Can you? Can you? I might address myself to a brother who was once among the profane and the drunken, who is now among the most earnest of us, and I might ask him—Brother, would you go back? I am sure that the thought of the rack would be more pleasant than the idea of returning to his old haunts. I might address myself to another who was fond of every form of gaiety, spending his money for that which was not bread, and his labor for that which did not satisfy him, he will be found among us tonight, happiest among the happy in the service of his Master, and I inquire of him—Brother, will you go back? Would you like to enjoy all your gay life again? It would be death to you. Suppose that any of us who know the joy of being Christ’s could have it proposed to us to go back, suppose we were not immoral, but were everything that could be desired in our outward conduct, would we like to go back to that dead morality which had no life of faith nor light of hope about it? No, no. When Christian in the Pilgrim’s Progress thought about going back he remembered that he had no armor for his back. He had a breastplate, he was covered from head to foot by his shield, but there was nothing to protect his back, and

therefore if he retreated, the adversary could skewer him with a javelin in a moment. So he thought that, bad as it was to go forward, it would be worse to go backward, and therefore he bravely cut a path for himself straight onward for glory. Look at that fact whenever you are tempted. Do not endure the idea of turning tail in the day of battle! May retreat be impossible to you. God make it impossible by His grace!

But then to whom should we go? I was ruminating in my mind the other day—

“Could I so false, so faithless prove
To quit Your service and Your love,
Where, Lord, could I, Your presence shun,
Or from Your dreadful glory run?”

Where could I retire if I would avoid my lifework, and cease witnessing for Jesus? If I was on board ship, and a storm came, the sailors would say, “He is the Jonah.” I know they would. If I forsook my God and His cause, the lowest and meanest would point at me as a turncoat. If I were to cross the western continent, and hide away in the back settlements, it is ten to one that if I went into the most remote log cabin somebody would spy me out, and say, “Why, you are the man whose sermons I read in our newspapers. How did you come to be here?” In the loneliest spots on earth, where men speak the English tongue, my own sermons would serve as a hue and cry, if not as a writ of arrest. I should be sure to hear the question, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” and how could I answer? Where could I go? No hiding place remains for me. I must serve God forever. So is it with you in a degree, dear friends. You cannot get away from Jesus. You that are disciples have committed yourselves to Christ. There is nowhere for you to go. Suppose you were to try infidelity. You know too much,

you have felt too much. Unbelief would not ease *you*, whatever it may do with others. Be a free-thinker! Well, you are made of the wrong stuff for that now, your conscience would trouble you. Suppose you became a Romanist. Would forms and ceremonies content you? No. Of all the people in the world that cannot be Romanists, commend me to Baptists. A few have joined the church of Rome—so few, that I never knew but one. You cannot convert these dreadful Anabaptists, they are too positive, and too much accustomed to prefer their own judgment to the directions of a ghostly father. My brethren, I do not know where you can go if you leave Jesus and the truth. You can go down to the bottomless pit, if you will, but you will have no rest there, for the lost ones will cry, “Have you come here? Why, you were at the Lord’s table, were you not? You are the people that used to give away tracts. Did we not hear you preach at the corner of the streets?” It will be an uneasy thing for you to be lost, I tell you, sirs, ten times worse than for others, for the hiss of those who never professed religion will follow you throughout eternity, and their words will burn like coals of juniper when they cry, “Hypocrite! Apostate! You knew the truth and did it not!” There is nowhere else for us to go. If we are weary of our Master we cannot get another, where can we find another as good as He is? Shall we go back, or shall we get right with Him? Let us go at once and tell Him how foolish we have been. Let us beg Him to keep us in His house. “Dismiss me not from Your service, Lord.” I am not worthy even to unloose the laces of Your shoes, but let me be Your servant, for whom else can I serve? How else can I live? What other joy remains for me but to do something for Your blessed name?

But then Peter gave a second answer. He said to our Lord, “*You have the words of eternal life,*” as much as to say, “We cannot go away from You, good Master, when we think of eternity.” Oh, eternity! Eternity! Those who for a little wealth, or to

escape a foolish laugh, shall turn aside from Christ—what will they do in eternity? Those who, to be thought respectable, or to be considered clever, shall renounce the simple gospel of Christ—what will they do in eternity? Christ alone can give eternal life or life for eternity. Apart from Him we are cast out as dead. The unbelievers shall be banished forever from the presence of God and the glory of His power, for “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” Brethren, we believe that there is salvation in Christ, and nowhere else. How can we leave Him, then? We know and are sure that His word has already put the immortal life into us, for we feel it pulsing within our being. We sometimes see glimmerings of the eternal day, into which the light we have is sure to develop, and we are certain that the Lord has given us eternal life by His word. How, then, can we forsake Him? Bind us, Savior—bind us to Yourself! Come, brand us with the cross. Let us bear in our body Your mark. Some of us wear the watermark upon our whole body. Our seal of the covenant is not on some one portion of our frame, but we have been immersed into Your name, and from head to foot we are Yours. We cannot undo the fact that we were buried with You by baptism unto death. Yours by that outward sign, but yet much more Yours by the inward grace which You have given, by which You have made us dead to the world, dead to self, and quickened us unto eternal life in Yourself.

There are two ties, then, to hold us. The one is that we have nowhere else to go, and the second is that we have no life apart from Christ.

The third holdfast is this, “*We believe and are sure that You are that Christ, the Son of the living God.*” “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed it unto you.” Have you learned, dear brethren, that Christ is truly the Messiah, the Son of the Father? Do you believe it? And more than that,

do you both believe and know that Christ is also the Son of the Highest? How can we leave Him? Has God sent Him, and shall we forsake Him? Is He God, and shall we desert Him? No, good Master, at Your feet we fall, and to those feet we cling. We humbly resolve by Your good Spirit's power to abide in You. Savior, we will be Yours forever. You may speak this very boldly, if you speak it in the confidence of grace, for, brethren, "Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?"

What torments the saints have endured from their persecutors, and how ineffectual have been the assaults of their foes to separate them from Christ! If we are really one with Christ, Satan can no more tear *us* away from Jesus than he could tear away Paul or John. These saints had no more power of their own than we have, they derived everything from Christ, and we do the same. Think of how the martyrs have been scourged and even flayed alive, and yet have cried out, "None but Christ." They have been tied to the tails of horses and dragged to death, but never a thought of apostatizing has occurred to them. In those early days men, women, and children crowded the tribunals till the judges grew weary of their bloody task. The persecutors devised all kinds of tortures, such as I scarcely dare mention, but the saints of God triumphed over all their torments. Fierce was the duel between the infernal cruelty of Roman paganism and the splendor of God within the souls of faithful men and women.

Look even later down at our own Marian persecutions, when Smithfield was all aglow with the death of the saints, how gloriously believers defeated their adversaries! We read of a holy woman bearing a child in prison crying out in labor, and her tormentors exultingly demanded, "If you cannot bear these pangs, how will you bear to be burnt alive in a few days' time?" She replied, "You see in me, who am a woman, the feebleness

of nature, but wait till the day comes, and you shall see in me, who am a member of the body of Christ, the strength of grace, for I shall never start or cry when I am burning for Christ.” And they took note that she never flinched, or winced, or cried, or stirred, but quick to the death she burned in her confession of her Lord. Oh, it was amazing! It was amazing! Christ laughed at His mightiest enemies, but His Spirit rested upon His poor, feeble saints, and strengthened them so that they were more than conquerors.

Think of Ann Askew, whom I often quote—our own Ann Askew—sitting up after they had racked her till every bone was dragged from its fellow, and still defending the faith against the Romish shavelings. O that we had the same grace. We shall have it when the trial comes, for “the Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” If Jesus is indeed the Anointed of the Lord, He will anoint us in the hour of need, and because we believe and are sure that it is even so, we are bold to say in His strength, “No, Lord, we will never leave You. Though all men shall forsake You, yet we will not.” By Your faithfulness, O Lord, keep us faithful. Amen.

1647 THE DREAM OF PILATE'S WIFE – MATT. 27:19

A Sermon

Delivered on Sunday Morning, February 26, 1882,

by the

REV. C. H. SPURGEON

At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, "Have you nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him." — Matthew 27:19

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Romans 3]

I EARNESTLY WISHED to pursue the story of our Savior's trials previous to His crucifixion, but when I sat down to study the subject I found myself altogether incapable of the exercise. "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me." My emotions grew so strong, and my sense of our Lord's grief became so extremely vivid, that I felt I must waive the subject for a time. I could not watch with Him another hour, and yet I could not leave the hallowed scene. It was, therefore, a relief to meet with the episode of Pilate's wife and her dream. It enables me to continue the thread of my narrative, and yet to relax the extreme tension of the feelings caused by a near view of the Master's grief and shame. My spirit failed before the terrible sight. I thought I saw Him brought back from Herod where the men of war had set Him at naught. I followed Him through the streets again as the cruel priests pushed through the crowd and hastened Him back to Pilate's hall. I thought I heard them

in the streets electing Barabbas, the robber, to be set free, instead of Jesus, the Savior, and I detected the first rising of that awful cry, “Crucify, crucify,” which they shrieked out from their bloodthirsty throats, and there He stood who loved me and gave Himself for me, like a lamb in the midst of wolves, with none to pity and none to help Him. The vision overwhelmed me, especially when I knew that the next stage would be that Pilate, who had cleared Him, by declaring, “I find no fault in Him,” would give Him over to the tormentors that He might be scourged, that the mercenary soldiery would crown Him with thorns and mercilessly insult Him, and that He would be brought forth to the people and announced to them with those heart-rending words, “Behold the man!” Was there ever sorrow like His sorrow? Rather than speak about it this day, I feel inclined to act like Job’s friends, of whom it is written, that at the sight of him “they lifted up their voices and wept; and sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spoke a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great.”

We leave the Master awhile to look at this dream of Pilate’s wife, which is only spoken of once in the Scriptures, and then by Matthew. I know not why only that evangelist should have been commissioned to record it, perhaps he alone heard of it, but the one record is sufficient for our faith, and long enough to furnish food for meditation. We receive the story as certified by the Holy Spirit.

Pilate throughout his term of office had grossly misbehaved himself. He had been an unjust and unscrupulous ruler of the Jews. The Galileans and the Samaritans both felt the terror of his arms, for he did not hesitate to massacre them at the slightest sign of revolt. And among the Jews themselves, he had sent men with daggers into the midst of the crowds at the great gatherings, and so had cut off those who were

obnoxious to him. Gain was his objective, and pride ruled his spirit. At the time when Jesus of Nazareth was brought before him, a complaint against him was on the way to Tiberius the Emperor, and he feared lest he should be called to account for his oppressions, extortions, and murders. His sins at this moment were beginning to punish him, as Job would word it, “The iniquities of his heels compassed him about.”

One terrible portion of the penalty of sin is its power to force a man to commit yet further iniquity. Pilate's transgressions were now howling around him like a pack of wolves, he could not face them, and he had not grace to flee to the one great refuge. But his fears drove him to flee before them, and there was no way apparently open for him but that which led him into yet deeper abominations. He knew that Jesus was without a single fault, and yet since the Jews clamored for His death, he felt that he must yield to their demands, or else they would raise another accusation against him, namely, that he was not loyal to the sovereignty of Caesar, for he had allowed one to escape who had called Himself a king. If he had behaved justly he would not have been afraid of the chief priests and scribes. Innocence is brave, but guilt is cowardly. Pilate's old sins found him out and made him weak in the presence of the despicable crew, whom otherwise he would have driven from the judgment seat. He had power enough to have silenced them, but he had not sufficient decision of character to end the contention. The power was gone from his mind because he knew that his conduct would not bear investigation, and he dreaded the loss of his office, which he held only for his own ends. See there with pity that scornful but vacillating creature wavering in the presence of men more wicked than himself and more determined in their purpose. The fell determination of the wicked priests caused hesitating

policy to tremble in their presence, and Pilate was driven to do what he would gladly have avoided.

The manner and the words of Jesus had impressed Pilate. I say the manner of Jesus, for His matchless meekness must have struck the governor as being a very unusual thing in a prisoner. He had seen in captured Jews the fierce courage of fanaticism, but there was no fanaticism in Christ. He had also seen in many prisoners the meanness which will do or say anything to escape from death, but he saw nothing of that about our Lord. He saw in Him unusual gentleness and humility combined with majestic dignity. He beheld submission blended with innocence. This made Pilate feel how awful goodness is. He was impressed—he could not help being impressed—with this unique sufferer. Besides, our Lord had before him witnessed a good confession—you remember how we considered it the other day—and though Pilate had huffed it off with the pert question, “What is truth?” and had gone back into the judgment hall, yet there was an arrow fixed within him which he could not shake off. It may have been mainly superstition, but he felt an awe of one whom he half suspected to be an extraordinary person. He felt that he himself was placed in a very extraordinary position, being asked to condemn one whom he knew to be perfectly innocent. His duty was clear enough, he could never have had a question about that, but duty was nothing to Pilate in comparison with his own interests. He would spare the Just One if he could do so without endangering himself, but his cowardly fears lashed him on to the shedding of innocent blood.

At the very moment when he was vacillating, when he had proffered to the Jews the choice of Barabbas, or Jesus of Nazareth—at that very moment, I say, when he had taken his seat upon the bench, and was waiting for their choice, there came from the hand of God a warning to him, a warning which

would forever make it clear that, if he condemned Jesus, it would be done voluntarily by his own guilty hands. Jesus must die by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, and yet it must be by wicked hands that He is crucified and slain, and therefore Pilate must not sin in ignorance. A warning to Pilate came from his own wife concerning her morning's dream, a vision of mystery and terror, warning him not to touch that just person, "For," she said, "I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him." There are times in most men's lives when, though they have been wrong, yet they have not quite been set on mischief, but have come to a pause and have deliberated as to their way, and then God in great mercy has sent them a caution, and has set up a danger signal bidding them stop in their mad career before they plunged themselves finally into irretrievable ruin. Somewhere in that direction lies the subject of our present discourse. O that the Spirit of God may make it useful to many.

I. And first, I call your attention to **THE COOPERATION OF PROVIDENCE WITH THE WORK OF GOD**. I call it the work of God to warn men against sin, and I call your attention to Providence working with it to bring the preventives and cautions of divine mercy home to men's minds.

For, first, observe the providence of God *in sending this dream*. If anything beneath the moon may be thought to be exempt from law, and to be the creature of pure chance, surely it is a dream. True, there were in old times, dreams in which God spoke to men prophetically, but ordinarily they are the carnival of thought, a maze of mental states, a dance of disorder. The dreams which would naturally come to the wife of a Roman governor would not be likely to have much of tenderness or conscience in them, and would not, in all probability, of themselves run in the line of mercy. Dreams ordinarily are the most disorderly of phenomena, and yet it

seems that they are ordered of the Lord. I can well understand that every drop of spray which flashes from the wave when it dashes against the cliff has its appointed orbit as truly as the stars of heaven, but the thoughts of men appear to be utterly lawless, especially the thoughts of men when deep sleep falls upon them. One might as well foretell the flight of a bird as the course of a dream. Such wild fantasies seem to be ungoverned and ungovernable.

Many things operate naturally to fashion a dream. Dreams frequently depend upon the condition of the stomach, upon the meat and drink taken by the sleeper before going to rest. They often owe their shape to the state of the body or the agitation of the mind. Dreams may, no doubt, be caused by that which transpires in the chamber of the house, a little movement of the bed caused by passing wheels, or the tramp of a band of men, or the passing of a domestic across the floor, or even the running of a mouse behind the wall, may suggest and shape a dream. Any slight matter affecting the senses at such time may raise within the slumbering mind a mob of strange ideas.

Yet whatever may have operated in this lady's case, the hand of providence was in it all, and her mind, though fancy free, wandered nowhere but just according to the will of God to accomplish the divine purpose. She must dream just so and no way else, and that dream must be of such and such an order, and none other. Even dreamland knows no god but God, and even phantoms and shadows come and go at His bidding, neither can the images of a night vision escape from the supreme authority of the Most High. See the providence of God in the fact that the dream of Pilate's wife, however caused, should be of such a form and come at such a time as this. Certain old writers trace her dream to the devil, who thus hoped to prevent the death of our Lord, and so prevent our redemption. I do not agree with the notion, but even if it were

so, I admire all the more the providence which overrules even the devices of Satan for the purposes of wisdom. Pilate must be warned, so that his sentence may be his own act and deed, and that warning is given him through his wife's dream, so does Providence work.

Note, next, the providence of God in arranging that *with this dream there should be great mental suffering*. "I have suffered many things in a dream concerning Him!" I cannot tell what vision passed before her mind's eye, but it was one which caused her terrible agony. A modern artist has painted a picture of what he imagined the dream to be, but I shall not attempt to follow that great man in the exercise of fancy. Pilate's wife may have realized in her sleep the dreadful spectacle of the crown of thorns and the scourge, or even of the crucifixion and the death agony. And truly, I know of nothing more calculated to make the heart suffer many things concerning the Lord Jesus than a glance at His death. Around the cross there gathers grief enough to cause many a sleepless night, if the soul has any tenderness left in it. Or her dream may have been of quite another kind. She may have seen in vision the Just One coming in the clouds of heaven. Her mind may have pictured Him upon the great white throne, even the man whom her husband was about to condemn to die. She may have seen her husband brought forth to judgment, himself a prisoner to be tried by the Just One, who had before been accused before him. She may have awaked; startled at the shriek of her husband, as he fell back into the pit that knows no bottom. Whatever it was, she had suffered repeated painful emotions in the dream, and she awoke startled and amazed. The terror of the night was upon her, and it threatened to become a terror to her for all her days, and she therefore hastens to stay her husband's hand. Now, herein is the hand of God, and the simple story goes to prove that the wandering nomads of dreamland are still under His

control, and He can cause them to produce distress and anguish, if some grand end is to be served thereby.

Equally remarkable is it that *she should have sent to her husband the message*, “Have nothing to do with this just person.” Most dreams we quite forget. A few we mention as remarkable, and only now and then is one impressed upon us so that we remember it for years. Scarcely have any of you had a dream which made you send a message to a magistrate upon the bench. Such an intention would only be resorted to in an urgent case. Though the judge was your own husband you would be very hard-pressed before you would worry him with your dreams while he was occupied with important public business. Mostly a dream may wait till business is over. But so deep was the impression upon this Roman lady’s mind that she does not wait until her lord comes home, but sends to him at once. Her advice is urgent—“Have you nothing to do with this Just One.” She must warn him now, before he has laid a stroke on Him, much less stained his hands in His blood. Not, “Have a little to do and scourge Him, and let Him go,” but “Have you nothing to do with Him. Say not an unkind word, nor do Him any injury! Deliver Him from His adversaries! If He must die, let it be by some other hand than yours! My husband, my husband, my husband, I beseech you; have nothing to do with this just person. Let Him alone, I pray you!” She words her message very emphatically. “Have you nothing to do with this just person: for I have suffered many things in a dream concerning Him. Think of your wife! Think of yourself! Let my sufferings about this Holy One be a warning to you. For my sake let Him alone!” And yet, do you know, her message to my ear sounds rather authoritative for a woman to her husband, and he a judge! There is a tone about it that is not ordinarily in the address of wives to husbands. “Have you nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of

Him.” It shows a wonderful providence of God that this lady was moved to send so strong a message to her self-willed husband, to beseech, to entreat, to implore, almost to demand of him, that he let this just man go. O Providence, how mightily can you work! O Lord, the seraphim obey You, but You find an equally willing servitor in a wife who, at Your bidding, stands between her husband and a crime!

Once more, about this providence I want you to notice *the peculiar time in which her warning came*. It was evidently a dream of the morning, “I have suffered many things in a dream this day.” The day had not long broken—it was yet early in the morning. The Romans had a superstition that morning dreams are true. I suppose it was after her husband had left her that she thus dreamed. If I may be allowed, not to state a fact, but to make a conjecture, which seems to me most probable, she was a dearly beloved wife, but sickly and therefore needed to rest further into the day than her husband. And when he had left his couch, she had yet another sleep, and being a sensitive person, and all the more likely to dream, she awoke from her morning sleep oppressed with a terror which she could not shake off. Pilate was gone, and she was told that he was in the judgment hall. She asked her attendants why he was there so early, and they replied that there had been an unusual clamor in the courtyard, for the high priests and a mob of Jews had been there, and the governor had gone out to them. They might, perhaps, also tell her that Jesus of Nazareth was brought there a prisoner, and the priests were entreating Pilate to put Him to death, though they had heard the governor say that he found no fault in Him. “Go,” she said to her maid, “call to one of the guards, and bid him go at once to my husband, and say what I tell you. Let him speak aloud, that some of the cruel Jews may hear it, and be moved from their cruel purpose. Let him say that I implore my husband to have nothing to do with this just person, for I have

suffered many things this very morning in a dream concerning Him.” Just at the moment, you see, when Pilate had sat down on the judgment seat, the warning came to him. When there was a little lull, and he was anxious to acquit his prisoner, at that instant of time which was the most hopeful, this weight was thrown into the right side of the scale, thrown in most wisely and mercifully to keep back Pilate from his grievous sin. The warning came at the nick of time, as we say, though, alas, it came in vain! Admire the punctuality of Providence. God never is before His time. He never is too late. It shall be seen concerning all that He does, that on the same day determined by the prophecy, the fulfillment came. My soul stands trembling while she sings the glory of her God, whose providence is high, even like Ezekiel’s wheels. But the wheels are full of eyes, and as they turn, all the surroundings are observed and provided for, so that there are no slips, or oversights, or accidents, or delays. Prompt and effectual is the operation of the Lord.

Thus much concerning Providence, and I think you will all agree that my point is proven—that providence is always co-working with the grace of God. A great writer who knows but little about divine things, yet, nevertheless, tells us that he perceives a power in the world which works for righteousness. Exactly so! It is well spoken, for this is the chief of all powers. When you and I go out to warn men of sin, we are not alone, all Providence is at our back. When we preach Christ crucified, we are workers together with God. God is working with us as well as by us. Everything that happens is driving towards the end for which we work, when we seek to convince men of sin and of righteousness. Where the Spirit of God is, all the forces of nature and providence are mustered. The fall of empires, the death of despots, the rising up of nations, the making or the breaking of treaties, terrific wars and blighting famines, are all

working out the grand end. Yes, and domestic matters, such as the death of children, the sickness of wives, the loss of work, the poverty of the family, and a thousand other things are working, working, always working, for the improvement of men. And you and I, lending our poor feebleness to cooperate with God, are marching with all the forces of the universe. Have comfort, then, in this, O workers for Jesus, suffering many things for Him, be of good courage, for the stars in their courses fight for the servants of the living God, and the stones of the field are in league with you.

II. Secondly, I gather from this story **THE ACCESSIBILITY OF CONSCIENCE TO GOD**. How are we to reach Pilate? How are we to warn him? He has rejected the voice of Jesus and the sight of Jesus— could not Peter be fetched to expostulate with him? Alas, Peter has denied his Master. Could not John be brought in? Even he has forsaken the Lord. Where shall a messenger be found? It shall be found in a dream. God can get at men's hearts, however hardened they may be. Never give them up, never despair of awakening them. If my ministry, your ministry, and the ministry of the blessed Book should all seem to be nothing, God can reach the conscience by a dream. If the sword comes not at them at close quarters, yet what seems but a stray arrow from a bow drawn at a venture shall find the joints in their harness. We ought to believe in God about wicked men, and never say of them, "It is impossible that they should be converted." The Lord can wound leviathan, for His weapons are many, and they are suited to the foe. I do not think a dream would operate upon *my* mind to convince me, but certain minds lie open in that direction, and to them a dream may be a power. God may use even superstition to accomplish His beneficent purposes. Many besides Pilate have been warned by dreams.

Better still, Pilate was accessible through the dream of *his wife*. Henry Melvill has a very wonderful discourse upon this

topic, in which he tries to show that probably if Pilate had dreamed this dream himself, it would not have been so operative upon him as when his wife dreamed it. He takes it as a supposition, which nobody can deny, that Pilate had an affectionate and tender wife, who was very dear to him. The one brief narrative which we have of her certainly looks that way, it is evident that she loved her husband dearly, and would therefore prevent his acting unjustly to Jesus. To send a warning by her was to reach Pilate's conscience through his affections. If his beloved wife was distressed it would be sure to weigh heavily with him, for he would not have her troubled. He would gladly shield his tender one from every breath of wind and give her perfect comfort, and when she pleads, it is his delight to yield.

It is, therefore, no small trouble to him that she is suffering, suffering so much as to send a message to him, suffering because of one who deserves her good opinion—one whom Pilate himself knows to be without fault. If this lady was indeed the wife of Pilate's youth, tender and dearly beloved, and if she was gradually sickening before his eyes, her pale face would rise before his loving memory, and her words would have boundless power over him when she said, "I have suffered many things in a dream." O Claudia Procula, if that were your name, well did the Lord of mercy entrust His message to your persuasive lips, for from you it would come with tenfold influence. Tradition declares this lady to have been a Christian, and the Greek Church has placed her in their calendar as a saint. For this we have no evidence, all that we know is that she was Pilate's wife, and used her wifely influence to stay him from this crime.

How often has a tender, suffering, loving woman exercised great power over a coarse, rough man! The Allwise One knows this, and therefore He often speaks to sinful men by this

influential agency. He converts one in a family that she may be His missionary to the rest. Thus He speaks with something better than the tongues of men and of angels, for He uses love itself to be His orator. Affection has more might than eloquence. That is why, my friend, God sent you, for a little while that dear child who prattled to you about the Savior. She is gone to heaven now, but the music of her little hymns rings in your ears even now, and her talk about Jesus and the angels is yet with you. She has been called home, but God sent her to you for a season to charm you to Himself and win you to the right way. Thus He bade you cease from sin and turn to Christ. And that dear mother of yours, who is now before the throne, do you remember what she said to you when she was dying? You have heard me a great many times, but you never heard a sermon from me like that address from her dying couch. You can never quite forget it, or shake yourself free from its power. Beware how you trifle with it.

To Pilate, his wife's message was God's ultimatum. He never warned him again, and even Jesus stood silent before him. O my friend, to you it may be that your child, your mother, or your affectionate wife may be God's last messenger, the final effort of the warning angel to bring you to a better mind. A loving relative pleading with tears is often the forlorn hope of mercy. An attack so skillfully planned and wisely conducted may be regarded as the last assault of love upon a stubborn spirit, and after this it will be left to its own devices. The selection of the wife was no doubt made by infinite wisdom and tenderness, that if possible Pilate might be stopped in his career of crime and strengthened to the performance of an act of justice by which he would have avoided the most terrible of crimes.

So, then, we may safely conclude that the Lord has His missionaries where the city missionary cannot enter. He sends

the little children to sing and pray where the preacher is never heard. He moves the godly woman to proclaim the gospel by her lip and life where the Bible is not read. He sends a sweet girl to grow up and win a brother or a father where no other voice would be allowed to tell of Jesus and His love. We thank God it is so. It gives hope for the households of this godless city—it gives us hope even for those for whom the Sabbath bell rings out in vain. They will hear, they must hear these home preachers, these messengers who tug at their hearts.

Yes, and let me add that where God does not employ a dream, nor use a wife, yet He can get at men's conscience by no visible means but *by thoughts which come unbidden and abide upon the soul*. Truths long buried suddenly rise up, and when the man is in the very act of sin he is stopped in the way, as Balaam was when the angel met him. How often it has happened, that conscience has met a guilty man even in the moment when he meant to enjoy the pleasure filled with wrong, even as Elijah met Ahab at the gate of Naboth's vineyard! How the king starts back as he beholds the prophet, he would sooner have seen the very devil than Elijah. Angrily he cries, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" Though, indeed, Elijah was his best friend, had he known it. Often does conscience pounce upon a man, when the sweet morsel of sin has just been rolled under his tongue, and he is sitting down to enjoy it. The visitation of conscience turns the stolen honey into bitterness, and the forbidden joy into anguish. Conscience often lies like a lion in a thicket, and when the sinner comes along the broad road it leaps upon him, and for a while he is sorely put to it. The bad man is comparable to leviathan, of which we read that his scales are his pride, shut up together as with a close seal, so that the sword of him that lays at him cannot hold, the spear, the dart, nor the javelin, and yet the Lord has a way of coming at him and sorely wounding

him. Let us, therefore, both hope and pray for the very worst of men.

Brothers and sisters, use for the good of men anything which comes in your way. Use not only sober argument and sound doctrine, but even if a dream has touched your heart, do not hesitate to repeat it where it may have effect. Any weapon may be used in this war. But see to it that you seek the souls of men, all of you. You who are wives should be especially stirred up to this sacred work. Remember Pilate's wife, and think of her as affectionately giving the warning to her husband, and go and do likewise. Never keep back from an ungodly husband the word which may convert him from the error of his ways. And you, dear children, you sisters, you of the gentler sort, do not hesitate, in your own quiet way, to be heralds for Jesus wherever your lot is cast. As for us all, let us take care that we use every occasion for repressing sin and creating holiness. Let us warn the ungodly at once, for perhaps the man to whom we are sent has not yet performed the fatal deed. Let us stand in the gap while yet there is space for repentance. Pilate is even now sitting on the judgment seat. Time is precious. Make haste! Make haste, before yet he commits the deed of blood! Send the messenger to him! Stop him before the deed is done, even though he should complain of your interference. Say to him, "Have you nothing to do with this just person: for I have suffered many things because of Him, and I pray you do nothing against Him."

That is our second point. God bless it. Although I cannot preach upon it as I would, the Spirit of God can put power into it.

III. Thirdly, we have now the lamentable task of observing **THE FREQUENT FAILURE EVEN OF THE BEST MEANS.** I have ventured to say that, humanly speaking, it was the best means of reaching Pilate's conscience for his wife to be led to

expostulate with him. He would hear but few, but he would hear her, and yet even her warning was in vain. What was the reason?

First, *self-interest* was involved in the matter, and that is a powerful factor. Pilate was afraid of losing his governorship. The Jews would be angry if he did not obey their cruel bidding. They might complain to Tiberius and he would lose his lucrative position. Alas, such things as these are holding some of *you* captives to sin at this moment. You cannot afford to be true and right, for it would cost too much. You know the will of the Lord, you know what is right, but you renounce Christ by putting Him off, and by abiding in the ways of sin that you may gain the wages thereof. You are afraid that to be a true Christian would involve the loss of a friend's goodwill, or the patronage of an ungodly person, or the smile of an influential worldling, and this you cannot afford. You count the cost, and reckon that it is too high. You resolve to gain the world, even though you lose your soul! What then? You will go to hell rich! A sorry result this! Do you see anything desirable in such an attainment? Oh that you would consider your ways and listen to the voice of wisdom!

The next reason why his wife's appeal was ineffectual was the fact that Pilate was *a coward*. A man with legions at his back, and yet afraid of a Jewish mob—afraid to let one poor prisoner go whom he knew to be innocent, afraid because he knew his conduct would not bear inspection! He was, morally, a coward! Multitudes of people go to hell because they have not the courage to fight their way to heaven. "The fearful and unbelieving shall have their portion in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." So says the Word of God. They are afraid of encountering a fool's laugh, and so rush upon everlasting contempt. They could not bear to tear themselves away from old companions, and excite

remarks and sarcasm among ungodly wits, and so they keep their companions and perish with them. They have not the pluck to say, “No,” and swim against the stream. They are such cowardly creatures that they will sooner be forever lost than face a little scorn.

Yet while there was cowardice in Pilate, there was *presumption* too. He who was afraid of man and afraid to do right, yet dared to incur the guilt of innocent blood. Oh, the cowardice of Pilate to take water and wash his hands, as if he could wash blood off with water, and then to say, “I am innocent of His blood”—which was a lie—“see you to it.” By those last words he brought the blood upon himself, for he consigned his prisoner to their tender mercies, and they could not have laid a hand upon Him unless he had given them leave. Oh, the daring of Pilate thus in the sight of God to commit murder and disclaim it. There is a strange mingling of cowardliness and courage about many men. They are afraid of a man, but not afraid of the eternal God who can destroy both body and soul in hell. This is why men are not saved, even when the best of means are used, because they are presumptuous, and dare defy the Lord.

Besides this, Pilate was *double-minded*. He had a heart and a heart. He had a heart after that which was right, for he sought to release Jesus, but he had another heart after that which was gainful, for he would not run the risk of losing his post by incurring the displeasure of the Jews. We have plenty around us who are double-minded. Such are here this morning, but where were they last night? You will be touched by today's sermon! How will you be affected tomorrow by a lewd speech or a lascivious song? Many men run two ways. They seem earnest about their souls, but they are far more eager after gain or pleasure. Strange perversity of man, that he should tear himself in two. We have heard of tyrants tying men to wild

horses and dragging them asunder, but these people do this with themselves. They have too much conscience to neglect the Sabbath, and to forego attendance at the house of prayer, too much conscience to be utterly irreligious, to be honestly infidel, and yet at the same time they have not enough conscience to keep them from being hypocrites. They let “I dare not” wait upon “I would.” They want to do justly, but it would be too costly. They dare not run risks, and yet, meanwhile, they run the awful risk of being driven forever from the presence of God to the place where hope can never come. Oh that my words were shot as from a cannon! Oh that they would hurl a cannon-shot at indecision! Oh that I could speak like God’s own thunder, which makes the hinds to calve, and breaks the rocks in pieces. Even so would I warn men against these desperate evils which thwart the efforts of mercy, so that, even when the man’s own wife, with tender love, bids him escape from the wrath to come, he still chooses his own destruction.

IV. Lastly, we have a point which is yet more terrible, **THE OVERWHELMING CONDEMNATION OF THOSE WHO THUS TRANSGRESS.** This Pilate was guilty beyond all excuse. He deliberately and of his own free will condemned the just Son of God to die, being informed that He was the Son of God, and knowing both from his own examination and from his wife that He was a “just person.”

Observe that the message which he received was most distinct. It was suggested by a dream, but there is nothing dreamy about it. It is as plain as words can be put—“Have you nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him.” Pilate condemned the Lord with his eyes open, and that is an awful way of sinning. Oh, my dear friends, am I addressing any here who are purposing to do some very sinful thing, but have lately received a warning from God? I would add one more caution. I pray

you by the blessed God, and by the bleeding Savior, and as you love yourself, and as you love her from whom the warning may have come to you, do stop, and hold your hand! Do not do this abominable thing! You know better. The warning is not put to you in some mysterious and obscure way, but it comes point blank to you in unmistakable terms. God has sent conscience to you, and He has enlightened that conscience, so that it speaks very plain English to you.

This morning's discourse stops you on the highway of sin, puts its pistol to your ear, and demands that you "Stand and deliver." Stir an inch, and it will be at your own soul's peril. Do you hear me? Will you regard this heaven-sent expostulation? Oh, that you would stand still awhile and hear what God shall speak while He bids you yield yourself to Christ today. It may be *now or never* with you, as it was with Pilate that day. He had the evil thing which he was about to do fully described to him, and therefore if he ventured on it, his presumption would be great. His wife had not said, "Have nothing to do with this man," but "with this *just* man," and that word rang in his ears, and again and again repeated itself till he repeated it too. Read the twenty-fourth verse. When He was washing his wicked hands he said, "I am innocent of the blood of this *just* person"—the very name his wife had given to our Lord. The arrows stuck in him! He could not shake them off! Like a wild beast, he had the javelin sticking in his side, and though he rushed into the forest of his sin, it was evidently rankling in him still—"that just person" haunted him. Sometimes God makes a man see sin as sin, and makes him see the blackness of it, and if he then perseveres in it, he becomes doubly guilty, and pulls down upon himself a doom intolerable beyond that of Sodom of old.

Beside that, Pilate was sinning not only after distinct warning, and a warning which set out the blackness of the sin, but he was sinning after his conscience had been touched and

moved through his affections. It is a dreadful thing to sin against a mother's prayer. She stands in your way, she stretches out her arms, and with tears she declares that she will block your road to hell. Will you force your way to ruin over her prostrate form? She kneels! She grasps your knees, she begs you not to be lost. Are you so brutal as to trample on her love? Your little child entreats you, will you disregard her tears? Alas, she was yours, but death has removed her, and before she departed she entreated you to follow her to heaven and she sang her little hymn—

“Yes, we'll gather at the river.”

Will you fling your babe aside us though you were another Herod that would slay the innocents and all in order that you may curse yourself forever and be your own destroyer? It is hard for me to talk to you like this. If it is coming home to any of you it will be very hard for you to hear it. Indeed, I hope it will be so hard that you will end it by saying, “I will yield to love which assails me by such tender entreaties.”

It will not be a piece of mere imagination if I conceive that at the last great day, when Jesus sits upon the judgment seat, and Pilate stands there to be judged for the deeds done in the body, that his wife will be a swift witness against him to condemn him. I can imagine that at the last great day there will be many such scenes as that, wherein those who loved us best will bring the weightiest evidences against us, if we are still in our sins. I know how it affected me as a lad when my mother, after setting before her children the way of salvation, said to us, “If you refuse Christ and perish, I cannot plead in your favor and say that you were ignorant. No, but I must say Amen to your condemnation.” I could not bear *that!* Would my mother say, “Amen” to my condemnation? And yet, Pilate's wife what

can you do otherwise? When all must speak the truth, what can you say but that your husband was tenderly and earnestly warned by you and yet consigned the Savior to His enemies?

Oh, my ungodly hearers, my soul goes out after you. “Turn you; turn you, why will you die?” Why will you sin against the Savior? God grant you may not reject your own salvation, but may turn to Christ and find eternal redemption in Him. “Whoever believes in Him has everlasting life.”

1648 GUILTY OF CHRIST'S DEATH – MATT. 27:24-25

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, March 5, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see you to it." Then answered all the people, and said, "His blood be on us, and on our children." — Matthew 27:24-25

[Scripture Read before Sermon – John 19:1-16]

THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST was the crowning sin of our race. In His death we shall find all the sins of mankind uniting in foul conspiracy. Envy and pride and hate are there, with covetousness, falsehood, and blasphemy, eager to rush on to cruelty, revenge, and murder. The devil awakened around the seed of the woman the iniquities of us all, they compassed the Lord about; yes they compassed Him about like bees. All the evils of human hearts of all ages were concentrated around the cross, even as all the rivers run into the sea, and as all the clouds empty themselves upon the earth, so did all the crimes of man gather to the slaying of the Son of God. It seemed as if hell held a formal reception and all the various forms of sin came flocking to the rendezvous, army upon army they hastened to the battle. As the vultures hasten to the body, so the flocks of

sins came to make the Lord their prey. By all the assembled troops of sins there was consummated the foulest crime which the sun has ever beheld. By wicked hands they did crucify and slay the Savior of the world.

We have been singing two hymns in which we took to ourselves a share of the guilt of our Lord's death. We sang—

“Oh, the sharp pangs of smarting pain
My dear Redeemer bore,
When knotty whips and rugged thorns
His sacred body tore.
But knotty whips and rugged thorns
In vain do I accuse;
In vain I blame the Roman bands
And the more spiteful Jews.
’Twas you, my sins, my cruel sins,
His chief tormentors were;
Each of my crimes became a nail,
And unbelief the spear.”

And then after the same manner we sorrowfully asked a question, and sang a penitential reply—

“My Jesus! Who with spit vile
Profaned Your sacred brow?
Or whose unpitying scourge has made
Your precious blood to flow?
’Tis I have thus ungrateful been,
Yet, Jesus, pity take!
Oh, spare and pardon me, my Lord,
For Your sweet mercy's sake!”

Perhaps some of you hardly understand what you have been singing. But others of us have sincerely and intelligently pleaded guilty of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. We know that He not only suffered for our transgressions, but by our iniquities. This is not clear to a great many, and I would not have them pretend that it is. They cannot see that they have anything to do with the matter of Jesus' death, and therefore they are not moved to repentance by hearing of it. Indeed, they imitate the example of Pilate in our text, when he took water and washed his hands before the multitude and said, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person." The object of our present discourse will be to awaken slumbering consciences. Without going into any metaphysical questions as to whether such a man did or did not actually have a share in the particular action by which Jesus died, I shall show you that in many ways men practically commit a like crime, and so prove that they have similar dispositions to those ancient Kill-Christ's. Though they repudiate the crucifixion, they repeat it, if not in form, yet in spirit. Though Jesus is not here in flesh and blood, yet the cause of holiness and truth and His divine Spirit are still among us, and men act towards the kingdom of Christ, which is set up among them, in the same way as the Jews and Romans acted towards the incarnate God. True, all men are not alike against Him, for the Lord spoke of some who have "the greater sin," and few are as guilty as the traitor Judas, that son of perdition, but in every form of it the rejection of Christ is a great sin, and it will be a great gospel blessing if it is repented of after the fashion of the prophet when he said, "They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born."

I shall now take up the story of our Lord's appearance before Pilate, from the moment of His being sent back to

Herod to the time when He was delivered to the Jews to be led away for crucifixion, and I shall try to exhibit by this narrative several ways in which men virtually put the Christ to death, and therefore become partakers of the ancient transgression which was committed at Jerusalem.

I. First, there are some—and these are they who have the greater sin—who are **DETERMINEDLY AND AVOWEDLY THE OPPONENTS OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST**. These are the men who are represented by the chief priests and elders of the Jews, who of old sought the Savior's blood, because they could not endure His teaching. Nothing else would satisfy them but that He should be removed from the earth, for He was a standing protest against their evil deeds. They hated Him because by His light their wicked lives were reprov'd. These were the true murderers of Christ, who gloried in their shame and defied the punishment of it, crying, "His blood be on us, and on our children." We still have among us those who cannot endure the teaching of our Lord Jesus. His very name seems to excite their worst passions. They rave at the mention of Him.

Oh, the atrocious things that some have said of late of the Christ of God. They have gone out of their way to insult Him. If anyone else had been slandered as He has been, society would not have tolerated the loathsome tongues. Accusations against Jehovah and His Son would seem to be delectable morsels to modern blasphemers, dainties upon which they feed greedily. My flesh trembles when I think of the hard speeches which the ungodly still utter against Him who in the day of His humiliation endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself. Many of these slanders would have been absurd, and to be dismissed with utter contempt, if it were not for the guilt of the men themselves, for in these speeches we see that the poison of asps is under their lips, their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. They do not treat so the heroes of war, the

philosophers of antiquity, nor even the notorious scourges of the race. To all of these they show some candor, and often award honors which are doubtfully due, but when they touch upon the person and life of our blessed Lord, candor and honesty are dismissed, anything like an attempt to understand Him is refused, and He and His are treated with ridicule, misrepresentation, and falsehood. They heap up their coarsest epithets, they put the worst interpretation upon His words, and they give the vilest misrepresentations of His deeds, and attribute to Him motives to which He was an utter stranger. Such men are among us, clamoring to be heard.

There have been unbelievers and deriders of Jesus in all times, but just now the race is of fouler speech than usual. Once infidelity was philosophical and thoughtful, and great names were to be found upon her roll, but now her noisiest advocates are bullies after the manner of Tom Paine, men who seem to delight in wounding the feelings of the godly and crushing every sacred thing under their feet. These are the true followers of the men whose mouths were full of, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” They cannot endure that Jesus should be remembered, much less revered. They claim to be “liberal,” and to be large-hearted towards all religions, but their unmitigated scorn of the faith of Jesus is displayed on every possible occasion, proving that the spirit of persecution burns within them. It would be idle for these to say that they would not crucify Christ, for they do crucify Him to the utmost of their power by their profane speeches against Him.

A certain number's main attack is aimed against the royal authority and reigning power of the Lord Jesus. They exclaim against Him because He claims universal sovereignty. They might not object so much to Christianity as one of various creeds, but as it claims to be supreme they will have nothing to do with it. The Roman Senate was willing to set up Jesus in the

Pantheon, among other gods, but when they learned that Christ claimed to be worshipped alone, and then He was denied a place in the circle of adoration. If the gospel claims to be truth, and judges other systems to be false, straightway it arouses the opposition of the broad school. We have men among us today who say, "Yes, there is something good in Christianity just as there is in Buddhism." Of this precious Buddhism they seem of late to be wonderfully fond, any idol will suit men so long as they can be rid of the living God. A Christ who will be everything or nothing is not to their taste. When He says that He will utterly demolish the idols, and break His enemies in pieces as with a rod of iron, they give Him the cold shoulder, for they are distinctly the enemies of Jesus Christ if He is set forth as Lord of all.

And we have some of milder cast who, nevertheless, join with this band, for their opposition is to the deity of Christ. These in effect cry, "We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God." They grow indignant over the claims which Christians advance for their God and Savior. Christ the best of men, Christ the noblest of prophets, Christ near akin to Deity, possibly a delegated God, they will go as far as that, but further they will not stir. "That all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father" is not to their mind. If Jesus is preached as "very God of very God," straightway we hear from them the cry, "Away with Him! Away with Him!" When we proclaim Jesus as King upon God's holy hill of Zion, and say of Him, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever," they refuse to bow before His divine majesty. They do, so far as they are able, destroy the divinity of Christ and reduce Him to a mere man. How can such people blame the Jews and the Romans? They could but slay His manhood, but these would destroy His deity. Is not their guilt as great? I charge all deniers of the Godhead of our Lord with being, as

far as they can be, His murderers, for they strike at His noblest nature by assailing His divine power and godhead. May the Spirit of God be here to convince them of their error and lead them to worship Jesus, who is exalted at the right hand of the Father.

I must charge home the accusation in the name of God and truth. Avowed opposers of Christ, had they been alive in the days of His flesh, would have wished Him to be put to death, for, so far as they are concerned, He is either dead to them in His true character, or else they are doing their best in their own conscience and upon the conscience of others to sweep Him out of existence. If they say they would not have put Jesus to a literal death on the cross, I say they are putting Him to a death which He would deprecate even more, namely, the destruction of all His influence over the minds of men. By decrying His atonement by which He reconciles men to God, by setting men's hearts against Him and causing them to refuse His salvation, these men do as far as they can, rob Him of the joy that was set before Him, for which He endured the cross, despising the shame. Is this nothing? Put me to death if you will, for I shall live when I am dead by the words which I have spoken. I should count it a far worse murder if you could sweep out of men's minds all that I have taught and overthrow all the good which I have attempted to do. And if it is so of a mere man, much more must it be so of Jesus—that merely to murder Him upon the cross is comparatively little compared with declaring, "We will not be influenced by Him, nor believe in Him as Savior and God, and to the best of our power we will prevent others from believing in Him." What a wretched objective for a man to live for, what a horrible fame for a man to seek after—to stamp out the gospel of Jesus. Terrible will be the punishment of this sin. Oh, opponent of Jesus, instead of being less guilty than the Jews of our Lord's day, you are even

more culpable. You are not slaying Him in one way, but you are doing it in another, and the crime is the same in spirit. I see a mystic cross to which your cruel words nail my Lord, I see before my mental eyes a Calvary whereon the Lord Jesus is crucified afresh and put to an open shame by infidel sarcasms and skeptical insinuations, I see Him derided and made nothing of by those who deny His deity and refuse to believe in His sacrifice. Enough of this. May conscience be present here, and the Spirit of God be present too, that men may not dare to wash their hands in innocence if they have been the open antagonists of Jesus and still are so. Oh that you would turn to Him, and become His disciples. His beauties are such that they might well charm every honest heart. His teaching is so tenderly reasonable, so full of sweetness and of light, that it is marvelous that men do not receive it with joy. His cross is unique—a bleeding sufferer, bearing offenses that were not His own, that His own enemies might live! The conception is so strange that it could never have originated in the selfish mind of fallen man. It bears its own witness on its brow. Woe unto those that fight against it, for it shall cost them dearly. He that stumbles upon this stone shall be broken, but upon whomever this stone shall fall it shall grind him to powder. See what came to these Jewish people, they were themselves crucified by Titus in such numbers that they could no longer find wood enough for their execution. Jerusalem destroyed is the result of Jesus crucified. Beware, you that fight against Him, for the omnipotent Father will take up His quarrel, and all the forces of creation and of providence will be at His command to wage war for truth and righteousness. The Nazarene has triumphed, and He will triumph even to the end, when He shall have all His enemies under His feet. O you that hate Him, be wise early and close the hopeless contest in which you chiefly fight against your own souls.

II. I hope there are not many here to whom this first part of my sermon applies. We will advance to a second point. Pilate, having a conscience which troubled him, was exceedingly anxious not to put Jesus to death, and yet could not see how he could avoid doing so, seeing that the Jews threatened to accuse him of lack of loyalty to Caesar, and that Caesar the gloomy tyrant Tiberius, who was unrelenting in his fury. After first sending his prisoner to Herod, he finds that he cannot escape in that way, and therefore he grasps at a second hope. He tells the mob that the custom of the feast required that one prisoner should be released, and that the choice remained with them. He hopes that they will choose Jesus of Nazareth. A vain hope indeed! It so happened that there was another Jesus in prison at the time, namely, Jesus Barabbas, who had been a murderer, and was guilty both of sedition and robbery. Pilate brings out the two and he gives the Jews their choice. It would make a wonderful picture if it were really so, as a writer on the Life of Christ suggests, that Pilate actually set the two individuals before the crowd. See there the dark-browed, scowling assassin, with fierce looks, and every mark of fury and hate upon his face, the man taken red-handed, familiar with blood, the brigand whose very profession was strife! There he stands like a wolf, and by his side is set the gentle Lamb of God. See there in His face and bearing, all that is good, tender, benevolent, heroic. The incarnations of hate and love are before them, and Pilate gives the crowd their choice. Without hesitation they cry, "Not this man, but Barabbas." "Now, Barabbas was a robber." The murderer walks away free, and the innocent Jesus is left to die. In this I shall have to impeach a second class of men **IN THE MATTER OF THEIR CHOICE.**

Many among us have by divine grace chosen Jesus to be our Savior, King, and Lord. He is the groundwork of our eternal hope, and the spring of our present joy, we have

selected Christ to be the guide and leader of our lives, and we are not ashamed of the choice. It has been made deliberately and solemnly, and we renew it from day to day—

“High heaven that heard the solemn vow,
That vow renewed shall daily hear,
Till in life's latest hour we bow,
And bless in death a bond so dear.”

I fear that some among you have not chosen Christ. But what have you chosen? Let me mention two or three objects of human choice, worthy to be ranked with Barabbas of old. Too many have chosen *lust* to be their delight. I will not paint the hideous monster. I have no colors. It is a foul and bestial thing. The cheek of modesty blushes at the very mention of it. Yet, for the pleasures of wantonness, Christ is set aside. For the strange woman many a man has thrown away his soul, and chosen infamy instead of glory! I half excuse the Jews for choosing Barabbas when I see a man obeying the lusts of the flesh instead of Christ, and yet I am probably addressing individuals who secretly indulge their baser passions, and are thereby held back from becoming decided Christians. They know they cannot be followers of Christ and yet indulge in wantonness and chambering, and therefore for this vile self-indulgence they let Jesus go.

Very frequently I meet with persons who have chosen another Barabbas instead of Jesus. What if, to borrow from heathenism, I call it Bacchus? *Drink* is the demon which enthralls millions. It is a vice which degrades men, and defaces the image of God in them. We insult the brutes when we say that a drunken man sinks to the level of the beasts, for the cattle never go as low as that. Alas, I have known men—yes, and women, too—who have been hearers of the gospel, and have

in a measure felt its power, and yet for this sin they have sold their souls and given up their Savior. No drunk has eternal life abiding in him, and to speak plain English, there are professing Christians who deserve to be called by that name. I say that they prefer the drink-demon to the holy Lord Jesus. You condemn the Jews for choosing Barabbas? Where will you find a counselor to plead for you when you choose drunkenness? If it was sinful for them to choose a murderer, what must it be for you to choose this cursed vice, which murders its hundreds of thousands? Oh, this national vice of ours, is the vice which makes this nation a byword and a proverb among the nations of the earth! What shall I say of it? And is this to be set in rivalry with my Lord? Oh, shame, cruel shame that this should be selected in preference to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us!

“Well, well,” says one, “I do not fall into that sin.” No, my friend, but what is it that you do choose instead of Christ, for if you do not set Him on the throne of your heart, you are choosing something else. Is it that you do not want to be a Christian because you wish to save yourself trouble and would be happy and comfortable and enjoy yourself? You do not choose any openly vicious way in particular, but you prefer to be moderately sinful and to take care of yourself, and save all care, thought, and anxiety about death and heaven and hell. You think that by leading a careless life you are happier than if you yielded yourself to Jesus? You are laboring under a mistake, but one thing is clear—self is your god, and that is a deity as groveling as any other. The idolater, who worships a god of gold or silver, or even of stone or mud, is not quite as degraded as the man who worships himself. Self-worship is coming very low, indeed. When I am my own god, or my belly is my god, can there be a lower depth? If I live merely to be easy and comfortable, and have no care for God, or Christ, or heavenly

things, what a choice I am making. Think of it, and be ashamed. Oh, I say again, in many a man's choice of what should be the object of his life, he sins precisely as they sinned who put away Jesus and chose Barabbas. I say no more. May the Holy Spirit send home this sadly convicting truth.

III. Thirdly. Pilate, seeing that he cannot, thus, set his prisoner free, gives Him over into the hands of the soldiers, who straightway make merry over Him and treat Him as an object of contempt. The words are cruel, and are enough to draw tears from all eyes as we read them, "Then Pilate therefore took Jesus and scourged Him. And the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns, and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe." "I am innocent here," cries one of my hearers. What! Are you quite sure that you are free from the sin of contempt and of causing pain to Jesus? Listen a while. When you have been so busy about the world that you could not think of Him, when you have been so eager to be rich that you laughed at the true riches, do you not know that you were twisting a crown of thorns to put upon His head? Your folly in despising your own soul sorely wounds Him. He pities you, and cannot bear to see that the thorns of this world should be the harvest which you sow and reap. If He were not so loving of heart and tender of spirit it would not matter, but this unkindness to yourself is unkindness to Him, and virtually when you have been full of cares and anxieties concerning the world, and have had no care and no anxiety about Him or about your own soul, you have put a crown of thorns upon His head. Is this nothing?

Let me ask you when you have gone up to the place of worship on Sunday, as you always do, and have pretended to adore Him, though you do not love Him, do you know what you have done? You have mocked Him by a feigned worship, and thus you have put the purple robe upon Him. For that purple robe meant that they made Him a nominal king, a king

who was not in truth a king, but a mere show. Your Sunday religion, which has been forgotten in the week, has been a scepter of reed, a powerless ensign, a mere sham. You have mocked and insulted Him even in your hymns and prayers, for your religion is a pretense with no heart in it. You brought Him an adoration that was no adoration, a confession that was no confession, and a prayer that was no prayer. Is it not so? I pray you be honest with yourselves. Is it not so? And then all the week long have you not preferred anyone to Jesus, any book to the Bible, any exercise to prayer, any enjoyment to communion with Him? Political objects have awakened you, but not the Lord's glory nor the spread of His kingdom. Is not this despising Jesus? Is not this mocking Him?

Are there not among you some who are weary of the Lord? Weary of the Sabbath? Weary of sermons about Jesus? Weary of atoning blood? Weary of praising the Redeemer? What is this but contempt of Him?

Too many have even jested about the holiest of things, if they have not mocked Jesus personally they have ridiculed His people for His sake, and made mirth of His gospel. By some, religion is set up as a scarecrow, and piety is treated as a byword, conscientious scruples are laughed at as old-fashioned absurdities, and devotion to Christ is set down as next of kin to insanity. We know it is so, even among some who are hearers of the gospel, and outwardly its upholders. There is contempt for the life and power of it, they know and honor its name, but the reality of godliness they do not value. At times their conscience thunders heavily at them, and then they are compelled to wish they had what at other times they disdain. They do despite to the blood of Jesus, and yet would gladly be partakers in its pardoning power.

I fear none of us dare wash our hands of this as a sin of our fallen estate. Time was when those of us who love Jesus

now, and could kiss every wound of His, yet thought so little of Him that anything was better than He. The story of His sufferings was as wearisome as a worn-out tale, and as for giving our whole selves to Him, we deemed it a fanatical expression or an enthusiastic dream. Blessed Savior, You have forgiven us. Forgive others who are doing the same.

IV. I have but a minute to spare for each point, so now I must turn to another sin of which many are guilty, namely, **THE SIN OF HEARTLESSNESS WITH REGARD TO THE SUFFERINGS OF OUR LORD.** Pilate thought he had another way of letting his prisoner go, and this he tried. He scourged Him. I will not tell you how dreadful Roman scourging was. It could not now be equaled except it is by the Russian whip. It was the most terrible of tortures. Many died under it, and almost all the victims fainted after a few blows. By it the human frame was reduced to a mass of bruised, bleeding, quivering flesh. When the Savior was all a mass of wounds and bruises, Pilate brought Him forth and said, “Behold the man,” appealing to what little humanity he hoped there still might be in the chief priests and elders. “Behold the man!” he said. “Is not this enough? He is crushed and battered and bleeding all over, is not this enough?” But they had no feeling for Him whatever, and only cried, “Away with Him.” If the spectacle of woe which our Lord presented on this occasion does not touch you, it is a lamentable proof of hardness of heart. Do not many read the story of His sufferings without emotion?

Despised, reviled, crowned with thorns, and scourged, our Lord stands alone as the Man of Sorrows, the Monarch of miseries. Grievings without parallel! Woes unique and by themselves! Have you no tears to shed for Him whom soldiers mocked and Jews derided? No? Is it possible that you answer, “No”? Have you heard the story till it has less effect than an idle romance? For shame! For shame! And the worst of it is

that it should not affect men when they remember that these griefs were voluntarily borne out of love, and not of necessity nor from any selfish motive. His woes were borne for His enemies. He bade His disciples begin to preach at Jerusalem that the men who spat in His face might know that they had a share in His compassion, and that he who drove the lance into His heart was one for whom He tasted death. He dies praying for His murderers. Ah me! That it should be so. A man dying for his friend is a noble sight, but a Man dying for those who put him to death is the most extraordinary sight that angels ever beheld.

There is this about it too, which touches believers most tenderly, our Lord suffered thus on our account. In His death is our hope, or else we are lost forever. If we have not part and lot in the merits of the agony, then for us there remains nothing but a fearful looking for judgment and of fiery indignation. Do we not mourn when we see Jesus dying for us? O feeling, you are fled to brutish beasts, and men have lost their reason. Surely our hearts will be like the rock in Horeb. Stricken by the rod of the cross, our souls will gush with rivers of penitential grief. And here is a marvelous proof of our guilt, that we have compassion for everybody but the Savior; that we can cry over a lapdog, and yet can hear of Christ with utter indifference. There are multitudes of persons of this kind, and I pray God's Spirit to touch their conscience upon this matter of heartlessness toward Jesus.

But I must hasten on, though I might wish to linger, leaving with your meditations the enlargement of these charges.

V. There is another crime of which many are guilty which was seen in Pilate, and that was the crime of **COWARDICE**. No less than three times did Pilate say of our Lord, "I find no fault in Him," and yet he did not let Him go. He himself said, "I have power to crucify You, and have power to release You,"

and yet he dared not exercise the power to deliver. Through cowardice he dared not let his perfectly innocent prisoner go free. He knew, but he did not act up to his knowledge. Have I any before me whose knowledge of good things far outruns their practice? This, surely, will be one of the never-dying worms of hell—the gnawing of an instructed and disregarded conscience. Over the door of their prison, the lost shall read this inscription—“You knew your duty but you did it not.” The knowledge which makes men responsible for their deeds increases that responsibility as it is itself increased, and with it their guilt and their punishment.

Moreover, Pilate did not only know the right, but after his own fashion he wished to do it. One almost pities the vacillating coward. See how he struggles to release Jesus in some indirect fashion which may cost him nothing. He wishes, he resolves, and then he hangs back. Like a vessel tossed with contrary winds, he is at one time almost in harbor, and soon he is far out at sea. Oh, the quantities of dead wishes that one might gather in this Tabernacle, as men gather untimely fruit which the wind has shaken from the trees. Men wish to repent, wish to believe, wish to decide, wish to be holy, wish to be right with God, but their wishing leads to no practical decision, and so they perish at the threshold of mercy. Their goodness ends in empty desires, which do but evidence their responsibility, and so secure their condemnation. Yet, to be just, we must admit that Pilate did more than wish, he spoke for Christ. But having spoken in His favor he did not proceed to action, as he was bound to have done. It is possible for a man to say with his tongue, “I find no fault in Him,” and then by his actions to condemn Jesus by giving Him up to die. Words are a poor homage to the Savior. Not by words does He save mankind, and not by lip service is He to be repaid. Pilate spoke boldly enough, and then retreated before the clamors of the crowd,

and yet Pilate could be firm sometimes. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, the priests begged Pilate to change the accusation which was written over His head, and he would not, but replied, "What I have written, I have written." Why could he not have shown a little backbone when Jesus yet lived? He was not altogether such a weak, effeminate being as to be incapable of putting his foot down firmly. If he did so once, he might have done it before, and so have saved himself from this great transgression.

Are there any Pilates here—persons who would long ago have been Christians if they had possessed enough moral courage? Some foolish companion would laugh at them if they became religious, and this they could not bear. Poor dastards! I heard the other day of a lad who dared not pray in the room where two or three others slept, and so, like a coward, he crept into bed and succumbed to the fear of others. I fear that some men would sooner be damned than be laughed at. Another person has a wicked companion, and he knows that he must cut his acquaintance if he becomes a follower of Jesus, this he would do, but he lacks courage. O you who shrink back from that, which Christ's service involves, because of the fear of men, know you not the portion of the fearful? O you trembling ones, is Jesus covered with wounds and shame for you, and are you ashamed of Him? Death is coming upon Him speedily, and do you hide your faces from Him? This is cruelty, indeed, both to Christ and to yourself. Can you not leave His enemies? "Come you out from among them, and be you separate: touch not the unclean thing." Will you not espouse His cause? "If any man will serve Me, let him follow Me." By this cowardice you do as much as you are able to put the Christ to death. "How?" you ask. Well, suppose everybody acted as you do? Would there be any Christianity in the world? If everybody was cowardly, would there be a church at all? Are you not killing Christ and

burying Christ as far as ever you can? Are you not destroying His influence and weakening His church by refusing to acknowledge Him? Is it not so? Look at it. Whatever influence you have in the world, you refuse to use for Jesus. Though multitudes are active in despising and opposing Him, you do not lift a hand in His favor. Why do you not come out and say, “I am on His side”? By your supposed neutrality you act as His foe.

You must be on one side or the other now that you have heard the gospel, for Jesus has said, “He that is not with Me is against Me: he that gathers not with Me scatters abroad.” You are against Him, and you are scattering abroad. Suppose others follow your example? “Well,” you say, “there is nothing bad in my example, except that I am not a Christian.” Just so, and under some aspects the very goodness of your example makes it operate all the more powerfully for evil. I do not think that the example of a thoroughly drunken man, for instance, leads many young people into intemperance. On the contrary, many take warning from the spectacle, and fly to total abstinence for security. I have often had young men and women coming to join the church who have been total abstainers of the most intense kind because a drunken father made their childhood so wretched, and kept the home so poor that they abhorred the accursed thing. See, then, how an evil example may lose its evil power by very excess. Yours is another case, your example is in some respects admirable, and then you throw it on the side of the devil. The better man you are the more mischief you are doing by siding with evil. Inasmuch as you are that which is moral, excellent, amiable, you are the very man whose influence Christ ought to have on His side, and if you cause it to go against Him the fact is all the more deplorable. If the weight of your character goes to make men ignore the claims of the Son of God, what is this but spiritually to compass His death?

VI. Lastly, and oh that the Spirit of God may bless this sharp medicine to some heart that it may feel the pangs of penitence this morning—there is the sin of **SELF-RIGHTEOUS HYPOCRISY**. This Pilate committed in set form. He took water and washed his hands and said, “I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see you to it.” What a contradiction! He is innocent, but he gives them permission to be guilty. They could not murder the Lord without his permission. He gives the necessary permit, and yet he says, “I am innocent.” Do I not see another of the same class over yonder? He says, “I do not despise Christ, or speak a word against Him. I am perfectly innocent of any ill will towards Him. Of course, if others oppose Him they may, for it is a free country, let them do as they like, but I am perfectly clear of it.” It is not the way that a man acts if he sees another being murdered. He does not look on and say that he would rather not interfere. You say you cannot help other people’s opinions? Have you no opinion of Jesus of your own? Do you say, “No, I never think of Him”? Is not that contempt? Do you decline to hold any opinion about one who claims to be your God? About one who must be your Savior or you must perish forever? You cannot sheer off in that way.

Now that rebellion is afoot you must either be loyal or be a traitor. The standard is unfurled, and each man must take his side. Your negligence of Jesus contradicts your claim to be neutral. You pretend to leave Him alone, but that leaving alone is fatal. A man is in yon upper room of a burning house, and you can save him. You refuse to touch the matter, for it is no concern of yours either way, and so you leave it to the firemen and their helpers. Meanwhile, the man perishes because you will not help him. I say that you are inexcusable, that man’s blood lies at your door. It was your duty to have rescued him. So the Lord Jesus Christ comes here among men and He is

persecuted. You quietly say, “No doubt it is a pity, but I cannot help it.” Just so, but by your inaction you side with His foes.

Do you say that you are so righteous that you do not need a Savior? That, indeed, is smiting Him on the face. He comes to be a Savior and you tell Him that He is superfluous, that you are so good that you can do without being washed in His blood. That is spitting in His face, and telling Him that He was a fool to die for you. Why should He shed His blood if you are innocent enough without it? In effect you charge God with folly for providing a great propitiation when such good people as you are need nothing of the kind. I do not believe anybody can more grossly insult the Son of the Highest! This is crucifying Him indeed! The self-righteous man who says, “I am clean,” deprives Christ’s sacrifice of its glory, His life of its end, His person of its dignity, His whole work of its wisdom. The very heart of God is set upon the objective for which Christ died, and yet the self-righteous man counts this a folly.

Come, my hearers, there is no room for any of us to accuse his fellow, let us all come with humble confessions to the feet of Jesus, now risen from the dead, and let us each say to Him right sorrowfully—

“’Tis I to whom these pains belong,
’Tis I should suffer for my wrong.
Bound hand and foot in heavy chains
Your scourge, Your fetters, whatever
You bear, ’tis my soul should bear,
For she has well deserved such pains.
Yet you do even for my sake
On you, in love, the burdens take
That weighed my spirit to the ground:
Yes You are made a curse for me
That I might yet be blest through Thee:
My healing in Your wounds is found.”

1649 FRESHNESS – JOB 29:20; PS. 92:10

**A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, February 16, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington**

My glory was fresh in me, and my bow was renewed in my hand. — Job 29:20

I shall be anointed with fresh oil. — Psalm 92:10

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Psalm 92]

THE FIRST TEXT tells us of the renown of Job, and of the way in which the providence of God continued to maintain the glory of his estate, his bodily health, and his prosperity. He was for many days, months, years, continuously prospered of God. Everything to which he set his hand succeeded. God had set a hedge about him and all that he had, so that none broke through to molest him. He grew richer, he grew more influential, he had more honor in the sight of his fellow men each morning that he walked to the gate. In every way he was advanced from day to day, and that throughout a long stretch of years. His glory was fresh in him. He did not achieve a hasty fame and then suddenly become forgotten. He did not blaze out like a meteor and then vanish into darkness, but he seemed to be continually fresh, vigorous, strong, energetic, and successful. He says that his bow was renewed in his hand, whereas a bow usually loses its force by use, and is less able to

shoot the arrow after a little while, and needs to lie still with a slack string, but it was by no means so with Job. He could send one arrow, and then another, and then another, and the bow seemed to gather strength by use. That is to say, he never seemed to be worn out in mind or body. Whatever he commenced was commenced with as great a freshness and zest as the last thing which he had accomplished, and that had been commenced with the same energy as the first enterprise of his youth. However, this did not always last, for Job in this chapter is telling us of something that used to be—something that was—something the loss of which he very sorrowfully deplored—“my glory was fresh in me.” He found himself suddenly stripped of riches and of honor, and put last in the list instead of first, while his purposes and aims seemed all to miss their way, and he had no strength and no glory left in him. Now he had reached the winter of his discontent, and those who before did him homage, became his assailants. So far as glory was concerned, he was forgotten as a dead man out of mind.

Now, brothers and sisters, this gives us a lesson that we must not put our trust in the stability of earthly things. It is said of the world that God has founded it upon the floods. How, then, can we expect it to be substantial? Beneath yon moon, continually changing, what can we discover that abides the same? Where the very light of heaven is waxing and waning, what is there but mutability? Change is written upon the face of all things. If, then, you have built your nest on high, reckon not too surely that you shall die in your nest, for the axe may fell the tree, and bring it down at an untimely date. If your children are round about you in good health, be not too sure of them, for they may be carried to an early grave, and the parent may yet be childless. If up to now you have been great in the esteem of men, think less than nothing of that, for the breath of popular applause is more fleeting than a vapor. It

scarcely comes before it goes, and they who yesterday cried, “Hosanna,” in the streets at your coming, may, before tomorrow’s sun is set, be crying, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” They did that to the Master, marvel not if they do it to the servants. This is the respect that makes all mortal things inconsiderable to a wise man, he scarcely will put them among his treasures, for they melt before they are fairly counted, like a coinage of ice. They are but as the counters that a child plays with, having only an imaginary value. The things which are seen are shadows; the things invisible are the only substances. Reckon, then, at their fit price, this transient glory of wealth, health, or fame. Lay up treasure, “where neither moth nor rust does corrupt,” and seek for stability in other things than these. Get the feet of your joy upon the Rock of Ages, and reckon all else to be but sand at its very best.

David, in the second text is talking, I think, about spiritual things, and he tells us with great joy that he should be anointed with fresh oil. He did not expect that his glory would depart, but he expected that it should be renewed. He did not reckon that the bow would lose its force in his hand, but that God would increase his strength from day to day. And if any of you here who are God’s people have any fears about the future as to your soul matters—if you are alarmed with the fear that you will share the same lot which Job shared as to his temporal glory—I would remind you that Job even in temporals received at last twice as much as he had in his flourishing days, and that God can turn His hand one way as well as another, and brighten your prospects as well as darken them. Foresee delight rather than despair. Even the lower springs shall continue to flow till you are beyond the need of them. Just now it is about spiritual matters that I want to speak, and if you have a fear that you must necessarily decline in these, I would remind you of the words of David, “I shall be anointed with fresh oil,” and

yet further on, of his other words, “They shall still bring forth fruit in old age, to show that the Lord is upright.” Never fall into the notion that a spiritual falling off is inevitable—there need be nothing of the kind, you may be fresh as the dew even unto the end.

The subject tonight will run in this way—first, *the excellence of freshness*, “My glory was fresh in me.” Secondly, *the fear of its departure*, and thirdly, *the hope of its continuance*, which hope is greatly encouraged by the words of our text, “I shall be anointed with fresh oil.”

I. First, then, notice **THE EXCELLENCE OF FRESHNESS**. “I shall be anointed with fresh oil.”

David had been anointed while still a youth to be king over Israel. He was anointed yet again when he came to the kingdom. That outward anointing with actual oil was the testimony of God's choice and the emblem of David's authorization, and oftentimes when his throne seemed precarious, God confirmed him in it, and subdued the people under him. When his dominion became weak, God strengthened him and his servants, and gave them great victories, so that as a king he was frequently anointed with fresh oil. David's royal brow was crowned with fresh laurels again and again, and his throne was settled and established by the hand of the Lord. Not with the same old stale anointing, a repetition of that which had lost its force, but with oil freshly pressed from the green olive, namely, with a new blessing and a fresh blessing from God's right hand was David often anointed, as I trust you and I may be. Freshness is a most delightful thing if you see it in another. It is a charm in nature. The other day, when the wind blew cold, someone said to me, “Yes, but how fresh the air is, and how refreshing—how different from that heavy, muggy atmosphere in which we were half drowned and almost entirely suffocated but a few days ago.” We want something fresh, and when we

get it we are freshened ourselves. How pleasant to go into the garden and see the spring flowers just peeping up. How agreeable to mark the brooks, with their fresh water leaping down the hills after showers of rain. The young lambs in the meadows and larks in the sky are delightful because of their freshness. Everything that is fresh seems to have a charm about it to our minds. But, dear friends, spiritual freshness has a double charm. Sometimes we know what it is to have a freshness of soul, which is the dew from the Lord. You remember when first your flesh was as that of a new-born child, I mean when you were newly born again and first knew the Lord. How fresh everything was to you! The pardon of sin—how it sparkled! The righteousness of Christ—how brilliant! The idea of being a child of God—how novel and how delightful! To be joint-heir with Christ—how it almost startled you, it was such a new idea to your spirit. And oftentimes since then, when your soul has been in a lively condition, everything has been bright, charming, exhilarating—nothing flat, stale, unprofitable. Even though you heard the same things said again and again, yet, because your soul was fresh, they came to you with unusual power. Your spiritual food, if you are healthy, is to you always fresh, like the manna in the wilderness, which was never stored a single night except for the Sabbath, but fresh and fresh it fell, and Israel gathered it and fed upon it then and there. Oh, it is a blessed thing to have your soul in a fresh state, filled with the ever-flowing living water. It is glorious to find everything about you fresh and new through the teaching of the blessed Spirit, so that you go from strength to strength, and like a roe or a young hart, leap from hill to hill. If we are now in the possession of it, may we always keep that freshness of soul, and never lose it.

How that freshness is seen in a man's *devotions*. Oh, I have heard some prayers that are really stale. I have heard them so

often that I dread the old familiar sounds. Some hackneyed expressions I remember hearing when I was a boy. I even now hear the vain repetitions, old, worn-out, good-for-nothing, rubbish expressions they were then, but they are still brought out by regular prayer-makers. Even where the words are new and original you will hear men pray in such a style as to make you say to yourself, "That prayer came out of Noah's Ark." As far as that man is concerned, there is nothing at all in it of life, sap, or savor. It has been dead long ago, and hung up to dry till not a particle of juice remains in it. But, on the other hand, you hear a man pray who does pray, whose soul is fully in communion with God, and what life and freshness is there! It may be that his expressions are somewhat rough, but they touch you because they come from his heart. Some of the confessions and petitions are strange to you, perhaps, and yet you feel that they are such strangers as it behooves you to entertain at once. You are glad that such words and thoughts have passed through your spirit and blessed you. You feel that you can pray with such persons. Their prayers will go to heaven, for they came from heaven. God has inspired them, and their originality is a part of the seal manual of the Spirit. I like to hear a brother even stop and stammer because he cannot go on, his heart is too full, and he cannot find words. Oh, but it is blessed to get a little freshness, even if it comes through a breakdown. I suppose that those dear friends who pray by the book of Common Prayer, somehow or other manage to put freshness into the prayers. I am always glad that they do, for it shows the vigor of their piety. As for me, I am such a poor, weak thing, that after I have repeated the same words about half-a-dozen times they do me no good. I must use words that suit the time, and suit the state of my heart, and suit my desires, and suit my depressions or my joys, and suit my thankful or mournful heart. One seems to want in prayer something fresh, and when the

prayer is old and worn, and seems to have been brushed and turned, and very little made of it after all, why, then it does not strike us, or impress us, or help us. I like to feel freshness even in singing a hymn. It may be that we know the words, but then we must put fresh heart into them, and feel them over again as much as if we were the authors of them. Then they become a grand vehicle for our praises. How sweet to sing, as it were, a new song! It is a blessed thing to have freshness about our devotions, be they private or public, exultant or repentant.

And so, dear friends, it is well to have freshness about our *feelings*. I know that we do not hope to be saved by our feelings, neither do we put feeling side by side with faith, yet I should be very sorry to be, trusting and yet never feeling. Surely it would be a dead faith. It would be a strange thing to be a living child of God and to have no feelings. I will tell you about feelings as they strike me. Sometimes I have deplored the condition of my heart before God, and thought my feelings to be the worst that could be. But what a foolish judge I have been, for in a week's time I have wanted to have those despised feelings over again, and thought that now at last I had fallen into a worse state than before. I am persuaded that we are very poor judges of the value of our own inward feelings, and perhaps, when we are lowest in our own esteem we are really highest in the sight of God. And when we feel as if we did not pray, we are praying, and the heart may be wrestling with God more when it fears that it does not pray than when you come down complacently out of yours closet and say, "I know that I have had a good time, for I feel perfectly self-satisfied." I long for truth in the inward parts, and wisdom in the secret places of the soul. Anything is good which rids us of pretense. Oh to be broken into splinters by the hand of God, and for every grain of dust to cry out to Him! I believe this mode of praying often prospers beyond any other. At any rate, give me not stereotyped

pretension to feeling, but fresh feeling. Whether it is joy or sorrow, let it be living feeling, fresh from the deep fountains of the heart. Whether it is exultation or depression, let it be true, and not superficial or simulated. I hate the excitement which needs to be pumped up. There is a something delightful to my mind in coming to the throne of grace weeping—a something delightful in coming to the Lord's Supper full of joy and gladness, to come to either place cold and dead is horrible. There is something delicious in knowing that what you feel is true, and comes up from the very bottom of your soul, and has a point and edge about it which proves how sincere it is. God keep us from stale feelings, and give us freshness of emotion.

I believe, dear friends, that there is a very great beauty and excellence in freshness of *utterance*. Do not hinder yourself from that. How I long for it as a preacher. When one has day after day to stand before the same assembly and to talk of the things of God, one dreads lest he should be so monotonous and full of repetition that even the things of God should come to be a weariness to God's own people. I have often thought that if some brethren, who are very careful to say exceedingly well what they do say, would be a little more careless and speak as it comes, letting their heart flow over at their lips spontaneously, there would be a far greater freshness about their utterance than there is when every sentence smells of the lamp and reeks of midnight oil. God forbid that we should say a word against the deepest study and the profoundest research of God's word, but still we may get to be so much students, that we scarcely speak like practical men who live among the people. By aiming at a very superior style we may fall into a thoroughly inferior one, and all our freshness may be gone. I like, for my part, the wild bird's note. Men get the bullfinch and teach it to sing a few notes, and then the piping bullfinch is greatly prized. But I have finches outside my window any one of which will beat any

finch in the world that only pipes a note or two, for they pipe much more melodiously, though they were never taught except by God and nature. There is a range of sweetness about their wild notes that a tutored bird cannot reach. Nature, pure and unsophisticated, is the best instrument for grace. I like to hear men speak of God as they have known Him, every man in his own order, and with his own voice. Coming fresh, perhaps, from the very haunts of sin, out of which free grace has fetched them, let them speak like Israelites fresh from the brick kilns—coming from the plow-tail or from the forge with all the trappings of their trade about them, and speaking just as they are, without pretending to be anything else than they are, and telling of God’s amazing love to them—not quoting the experience of others, but giving out their own, this will be their wisdom and strength. Oh, there is freshness about that, and a great power to catch the ear and to move the heart when God the Holy Spirit is present to bless it.

Now, you that have lately been converted do not go and learn all the pretty phrases that we are accustomed to use. Do not go and sit down at the feet of your dear teacher in the class and feel that you must talk just like him. Strike out your own course. Be yourself. “But I would be odd,” you say. All right, so is your pastor. You need not mind that. You will not be the only odd body about. Be encouraged by that. I think that a little of what people call oddness is just, after all, leaving God’s work alone. All the trees that God makes are odd. The Dutchmen clip them round or make them into peacocks, but that style of gardening is not to our mind. And some people say, “What a lovely tree!” I say, “What a horribly ugly thing it is.” Why not let the tree grow as God would have it? Do not clip yourselves round or square, but keep your freshness. There will be no two Christians exactly alike if they do that.

There should be a freshness, dear friends, about our *labor*. We ought to serve the Lord to-day with just as much novelty in it as there was ten years ago. I may even venture to say thirty years ago. Oh, I remember the seriousness with which I went out to preach the first half-dozen sermons I ever preached, and what a burden it was from the Lord. And how I did go at it with all my might—very clumsily, but still with all my soul and spirit. And do you remember when you began to teach the class, or began to take your tract district? Did you not pray over it? It seemed almost too good to be true that you should be trusted with doing anything for your Lord and Master. And you did it, oh, so intensely and therefore you had God's blessing. You did it well, though you blundered a good deal, for all your heart was in it, your motive was pure, and your faith was childlike. You blundered the right way, for you blundered with your heart, and so blundered into other men's hearts. Your heart was serving God, even in the mistakes you made. And now, perhaps, you can go round the district, and you are pretty well half-asleep over it, and you can teach the class, but there is not the vigor, the force, the energy, the intense desire, the burden that there once was, perhaps not all the joy. You can stand up and preach, dear brother, and you have got pretty well accustomed to it, and the people have got accustomed to it too, and they can nearly go to sleep, and you can too, and preach asleep. It is an easy thing to do, if you once learn the wretched art. There is a kind of sleep-walking in preachers. They can talk in their sleep in a very precise way—much more wonderful than walking. You cannot say, "I sleep, but my heart wakes." The fact is that it is the other way around—"I wake, but my heart sleeps," and it is a great pity when it comes to be so. We should pray to God that we may do everything freshly, just as if we had never done it before, only doing it with all the improvements which experience will bring to us. Pray with your children tonight as

if it were your first prayer with them. Speak with them about their souls as if you had never mentioned the subject before. Talk of Jesus as if you were telling news. Why, aren't you? Is it not always glad tidings, always news fresh from heaven? So God grant us grace that, when we come to be grey, and when we totter with our staff for very age, yet still we may tell out the story, if with feebleness of utterance yet with juvenility of heart, feeling that we are bringing forth fruit still, even to old age, for the Lord still anoints us with fresh oil.

So much for the beauty and excellence of freshness; it ought to run into everything.

II. Now, dear friends, in the second place, I will dwell upon the fear of losing it—**THE FEAR OF ITS DEPARTURE.**

I have heard some express the thought that perhaps the things of God might lose their freshness to us by our familiarity with them. I think that the very reverse will turn out to be the case if the familiarity is that of a sanctified heart. In other things, “familiarity breeds contempt,” but in the things of God, familiarity breeds adoration. The man who does not read his Bible much is the man who has a scant esteem of it. But he that studies it both day and night is the very man who will be impressed by its infinitude of meaning, till he will be ready to cry, like Jerome, “I adore the infinity of Scripture.” I know that he that prays most loves prayer most, and he that is most occupied with the praises of God is the very person who wishes that he could praise God day and night without ceasing. These things grow on you. Hence I would have no man fear that familiarity with holy things can take away from him their freshness and their beauty. You may drink at other wells till you are no longer thirsty, but, strange to say, this all thirst-quenching water, nevertheless, produces a much deeper thirst after its own self. He that eats of the bread of heaven shall hunger for no other, but shall grow ravenous for it. His capacity

for feeding upon it shall be increased by that which he has fed upon, and whereas at first the crumbs from under the table might have satisfied him when he knew himself to be but a dog, at last, when he knows himself to be a child, he wishes for everything that is set upon the table—

“Less than Yourself will not suffice
My comfort to restore.”

He must have all that is to be had, such is his desire. Dismiss, then, any fear from your minds about that. When we first of all commenced to break bread on every first day of the week, I heard some say that they thought that the coming so often to the table might take away the impressiveness of the holy feast. Well, I have scarcely ever missed a Sabbath now these 20 years, and I never was so impressed with the solemnity and the sweetness of the Master's Supper as I am now. I feel it to be fresher every time. When it was once a month, I had not half the enjoyment in it, and I think that where friends have the communion once a quarter, or once a year, as in some churches, they really do not give the ordinance a fair opportunity to edify them. They do not fairly test the value of an ordinance which they so grossly neglect, as it seems to me. No, you may have more, and more, and more, and more of everything that Christ has instituted and ordained, especially more and more of Himself, and the more you have, the more freshness there will be.

“Yes, but we have had a fear sometimes that there will be a lack of freshness about ourselves.” Well, that fear is a very natural one. Let me tell you some points on which, I fear, we have good ground of alarm, for we do our best to rob ourselves of all life and freshness.

Christian people can lose the freshness of themselves by imitating one another. By adopting as our model some one form of the Christian life other than that which is embodied in the person of our Lord, we shall soon manufacture a set of paste gems, but the diamond flash and glory will be unknown. Many godly people have a very deep sense of their corruption and inward sin, and this, together with sorrowful spirit, combines to make them a rather gloomy race. Often deeply taught in other respects, they fail to rejoice in the Lord. Certain of these have formed a school, and they have set up a standard, and judge everybody to be a deceiver or a mere babe in grace who cannot groan as deep down as they can. This is not wise. If you do that you will lose your freshness, for you will forever be scattering your dust and ashes over all the joys of your life. Why should the children of the bride-chamber mourn while the bridegroom is with them? Let us be happy while we may. There is another set of brethren who are always glad and happy, for they are healthy and competently provided for, and out of the way of temptation, and so they believe that they are perfect. They also set up a standard, and cut down everybody who cannot sing right up into the alto notes as high as they can. Well, you will get stale, too, brothers and sisters, whoever you may be, for self-laudation never keeps fresh long. When we have heard about half-a-dozen brethren boasting that they are nearly perfect, it is about as much as some of us can stomach. I cannot stand above two of them without feeling my boxing propensities set in motion. Poor fools, how have they persuaded themselves to hope that self-praise will be thought to be the height of piety? It is nauseous even to those of us who are prepared to make a measure of excuse for the fervid imaginations of the brethren. Drop into one particular groove, and run in it, take up one line of things, and stick to it, and you will very soon find yourself as far from freshness as a bit of

leather which has been worked on an engine to revolve forever and ever in the same course. The beauty of real life lies much in its variety. A brother comes to me on Sunday morning sighing. Thank you, brother, for that, I am glad that you are in that state, for that is where I am, and we can sympathize with each other. Perhaps tomorrow I meet this same friend and he is full of joy and delight, and I say, "Thank you, brother, I am glad to meet with somebody who is rejoicing in the Lord. You give me a lift. Now I shall be helped to rejoice in Him too." Sometimes in this pilgrimage to the Celestial City, I join company with a brother worker who laments that he has many difficulties in dealing with poor sinners. I say to him, "I am glad of that, for I have more difficulties than you, but I see that I am not alone in my anxieties." Another I meet with says that he has been so happy in meeting with souls that have found the Lord, and I reply, "Yes, and I am glad to see you, for I am happy, too, for I have met with many who have just found the Savior." These changes and ups and downs are like the delicious variations of the seasons—they are not always autumn, not always spring, not always winter, not always even the plenitude of summer. So with our souls, we are never so long in one place as to find monotony in life. No, the monotony is in death, the freshness is in life. These changes and varieties create a splendid freshness which we might not hope to have if we tied ourselves to one man's chariot, and resolved that our experience should be uniformly like his.

Another way of spoiling your freshness is by *repression*. The feebler sort of Christians dare not say, feel, or do, until they have asked their leader's permission. I have known a little village chapel in which, when the preacher had delivered a sermon, the people did not know whether he was sound or not, till they had asked the principal deacon, or they waited till they got outside and consulted a little knot of good old men and

women who had to act as tasters for all the others and give a verdict as to the orthodoxy of the performance. A few good souls thought the sermon to be very sweet, the man seemed to be preaching the gospel, but they did not like to commit themselves to the tune till they had got the key note, and when they had seen the brother that led them all, then they knew, and if he said that it was all right, why, then it was all right. Now, dear friend, if you feel that God is blessing you in any religious exercise, mind that you are blessed, and let other people who do not like to be blessed go without it if they must, but as for you, be blessed when you can. Do not be ashamed to enjoy that which others despise. Sit down and quietly feast on the kernel while others are breaking their teeth over the shells. If you feel that you must sing, sing without stint! Why not? In the kitchen—in the parlor—sing. Never mind if remarks are made, do not worldlings sing to their own liking, why shouldn't you? If sometimes you feel that you cannot sing, well, then, do not sing. Be yourself and be natural, as grace makes you natural—that is the thing. Let your mind have freedom, and do not feel as if you went about in fetters, bound to this and pledged to that. In the living kingdom of the living God there is no rule that you groan at eight o'clock in the morning, and sing at noon, that you sigh at half-past three, and get the plenitude of the Spirit at a quarter past seven. Nothing of the kind, it is a free Spirit under whose power we dwell, and He comes like the wind and goes like the wind, and acts according to His own pleasure. Lord, uphold me with "Your free Spirit." Do not repress Him. "Quench not the Spirit." Yield yourselves to His influences, and if you feel inclined to shout, be unseemly enough to do so, and give the praise to God. This is a successful way of keeping up freshness—to be rid of repression, and to be free before God.

If we want to keep up our freshness, however, the main thing is never to fall into neglect about our souls. Do you know what state the man is generally in when you are charmed by his freshness? Is he not in fine health? Some of my dear friends were known to call and see me when I was laid up some time ago, and I am afraid that they did not find much freshness about me then. On the contrary, they heard much the same old story—weary nights and painful days. I hope I did not display much impatience, but still, the tendency is to give a good deal of telling of what one has to endure. There is not much freshness about that. But a man is fresh generally when he is well, and everything is going right within his internal economy. Then he thinks fresh thoughts and uses fresh words, for all around him life is in its flowery age, and sparkles like the morning. I am sure that it is so with the soul. When the soul is healthy, when you are feeding on the bread of heaven, when you are living near to God, when you believe the promises and embrace them, when you are getting into the very sunlight of the Lord's fellowship, oh, it is then that fresh words, and striking words not often heard, will drop from you. Pearls will fall from your lips if those lips have been with Jesus, and He has kissed you with the kisses of His mouth. Do not neglect yourself, then. Let the fountain of the heart be right, and then the freshness will speedily be seen.

I have shown you the things by which a man may lose his freshness, avoid them carefully.

Those of you who are workers for God may have a fear that you will lose the freshness of your utterances— a fear which haunts a good many of us. Now, that may happen to us by our own fault if there is a lack of searching the word, if there is a lack of fresh acquisitions of sacred knowledge. And it may happen to us again, if we are always gathering the thoughts of others, and do not think ourselves. Then we shall lose freshness,

and become mere dealers in second-hand observations. Many thoughtful brethren are afraid that they may lose it through age. It does happen to men as they grow old, that much of the vivacity of youth departs, and we all know ministers who have lost much of their power to edify because their freshness and variety have gone. It is a sad thing that it should have to be so with any of us, but what a blessed thing it is if we can fall back upon that assurance, “I shall be anointed with fresh oil.” Nature decays, but grace shall thrive. The Holy Spirit will renew our youth. The grace of God can give us freshness after nature has ceased to yield it. And it shall be a better freshness, not the dew of our youth, but the dew of the Spirit of the Lord. If Jesus Christ is preached, age becomes an important help in bearing testimony to His faithfulness and power to bless. I can imagine it to be the duty of the aged minister to retire from the prominent sphere where he has long been the preacher, and I hope in my own case I shall not occupy this pulpit an hour too long. But the man of God can find another pulpit, and when he has found it, I can suppose him often beginning his youth again, as he tells out the story of the cross, and talks of Jesus, and proclaims the doctrines of grace again, beginning in his country sphere much in the same way as he set out at the first. At any rate, he has always this to fall back upon,” I shall be anointed with fresh oil.” The Holy Spirit will abide with him continually, and give him an anointing of freshness. And so with you, dear friends, you think when you have done addressing the class, “Well, I am pretty well spun out. I shall never be able to get another address.” Shall you not? Read that—“I shall be anointed with fresh oil.” And you that go out preaching in the villages, and often cry, “I do not know what I shall do for a sermon next Sunday,” think of this and be consoled—“I shall be anointed with fresh oil.” Fall back on that. If you are called to speak to the same people for any length

of time, it will make the promise all the more dear to you, as you can plead it before God, “Lord, anoint Your servant with fresh oil.”

I pray that all of us in heart and soul, and life and utterance and labor, may always be kept fresh, and may God grant that we do not backslide, for that would kill our freshness, and put in the place of its sweet smell the foul odors of sin. Oh to be holy, sweet, and vigorous even to the end. The Lord grant, that we may make large drafts upon Himself for greater faith, greater love, and greater joy, and then shall we have greater freshness. May we also be sustained from within by His blessed Spirit, and so may our freshness continue to our dying day.

III. I close with the third point, which is this precious word which gives us **HOPE OF ITS RENEWAL**. Let us not think that we must grow stale and heavenly things grow old with us.

For, first, our God in whom we trust renews the face of the year. He is beginning His work again in the fair processes of nature. The dreary winter has passed away. The time of the singing of birds is coming on, and the sweet flowers are peeping out from their graves, enjoying a resurrection of glory and beauty. Now, this is the God whom we serve, and if we have been passing through our wintertime, let us look for our spring. If any of you have been growing cold of late—if any of you have grown stale and mechanical, and have fallen into ruts, come look up, look up, and pray the great Renewer to visit you—

“Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove,
With all Your quickening powers.”

“He restores my soul: He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.” It will not take the Lord long to restore you. “His word runs very swiftly.” He speaks

even to ice and frost, and by His word they pass away. He has but to will it and all the genial days of spring and summer come hastening on, and the banner of harvest is waving. “Awake you that sleeps, and arise from the dead and Christ shall give you light.” Be hopeful, be joyful. There are better days for you. Put your trust in God, who renews the face of the earth, and look for His Spirit to revive you.

Moreover, there is an excellent reason why you may expect to have all your freshness coming back again; it is because Christ dwells in you. Do you not know it? Christ is formed in you the hope of glory, and if so, your glory will be fresh about you, for He never grows stale. It is God that said of Him, “You have the dew of Your youth.” Oh, the doctrine of the indwelling of Christ in the believer—let us never forget it! As long as that is a truth there is always a hope for us.

Then there is the other grand doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He dwells in you. If your bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, shall He not always be to you a fountain of new life—a spring of fresh delights? Why, it must be so. The Holy Spirit is not exhausted. His power is not even lessened in any degree whatever. He can make your face to shine again, and your tongue to sing again. He can make your heart leap again with joy unspeakable. Come, you that sit in the dust, begin to rejoice, for God the Spirit is still with you, and shall be with you—the Comforter whom Christ has given never to be taken away. Rejoice in Him, and ask Him now in His mercy to restore your soul and He will do it.

Oh, what a blessing it is to get right deep down into God’s word, for that word also is always new, and the source of new thoughts in those who feed upon it. This is the Book of yesterday, today, and forever, the Book which, though many of its verses were written thousands of years ago, is as new as though it were only written yesterday. From the mouth of God

the promises come at this moment, full of life and freshness and power. Come to it, it is all yours, every acre of this blessed land of Canaan is yours, and will yield you corn and wine and oil. There is not a star in the great firmament of Scripture but shines for you, not a text in all this mighty treasury of God but you may take it and spend it, and live upon the produce thereof. Therefore, while the word of the Lord is so fresh and so full, it cannot be that you shall be stale in thought and conversation. You shall be anointed with fresh oil. God Himself is with you, and He is always full. God Himself is with you and He is always living. God Himself is with you and He is always fresh, and He shall refresh your spirit. Why go away, come away from all that is stale and flat, and from all the dead past, and enter into eternal life, where flowers forever bloom, and fruits forever ripen, and the fresh springs forever flow. Come and eat the new corn of the land, and drink the new wine of the kingdom, and the Lord make you glad in His house of prayer for Jesus' sake. Amen.

1650 GOD'S FATHERLY PITY – PS. 103:13

A Sermon
Delivered on Thursday Evening, March 2, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

**Like as a father pities his children, so the LORD pities them
that fear Him. — Psalm 103:13**

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Psalm 103]

IN THE FORMER PART of this psalm the Psalmist sang of God's deeds of love, His gifts, His benefits, and His acts of kindness. But here he goes deeper into the divine motive, and therefore he finds sweeter incentives to devout gratitude. There is a fullness of consolation in the fact that the heart of God is towards His people. He not only dispenses blessings—so does the sun, so do the clouds, so do the fruitful fields—but He takes a warm interest in our welfare, and has a feeling towards us of kindly, gentle affection, and that of such intensity that one of the highest forms of earthly love is here used as a figure to set forth the tender mercy of our God towards us. I have always been taught as an axiom in theology that God has no griefs—that He is “without parts or passions,” I think was the definition. But I have often inwardly objected to such statements. They seemed to me so inconsistent with the tone and tenor of Scripture, for He appears to take pleasure in His people and to be “grieved” with their ill manners. Surely, metaphors that are inspired must have a meaning that is

instructive. If the Father's "heart yearns," if our Lord and Savior is "moved with compassion," and if the Holy Spirit is "vexed," there must be something analogous to what we call emotion among ourselves in the acknowledged attributes of the Most High. At least He appears to sympathize with us, so that "in all our afflictions He is afflicted," and He pities us "as a father pities his children." "That is speaking after the manner of men," somebody says. True and it is exactly the way I do speak. In no other way do I know how to speak, and until I learn to speak after the manner of angels, you must pardon me, and accept an apology, not only for my own ignorance of any other tongue than that in which I was born, but also for the incapacity of my hearers to understand any other than human language.

Neither do I know anything, so limited is my intelligence, except after the manner of men. It seems to me that if there is any other manner or means of communicating thoughts and emotions, it must belong to some other being than man. And if it is correct to speak after the manner of men, then be it understood I do speak after that manner, and I am perfectly satisfied that I am able so to speak the truth as shall give a faithful and adequate impression to your minds. There is a feeling which has a measure of pain in it, familiarly known to us as "pity." It is a love which so sympathizes with its objects that in a manner it makes itself one with them, and if it should involve suffering, pity shares the pang. If there is any kind of grief in the one that is pitied, he that pities becomes a partaker of that grief. I believe in a God who can feel. As to Baal, and the gods of the heathen, they may be passionless and without emotion, or without anything that is akin to feeling. Not so do I find Jehovah to be described. How did His anger kindle when He gave His people over to the sword, and was angry with His inheritance! And how transporting is His love to the daughter

of Zion when He rejoices over her with joy! He has a pity, yes, and a sorrow too, according to this Book. I dismiss therefore the theology of the schoolmen; I am quite satisfied with the divinity that I find in these Scriptures.

Believe it then, dear friends, with all your hearts, that God has kindly feelings towards them that fear Him, such as a father has towards his children. This is a truth of which I feel jealous, and I do not wish to see it toned down. There is a sentiment abroad that sounds plausible, and is accepted by many Christian people, that God puts us to much sorrow, wisely and for our good, while His own heart is unaffected or callous to our suffering, because He foresees, according to His own purpose, the good that will come out of it. Some kind of analogy might in that case be suggested between our gracious God and a skillful surgeon, who cuts, and cuts deeply, when he would remove a cancer from the flesh, or a physician who administers potent drafts of medicine, which, perhaps, cause excruciating pain. The surgeon would be too intent on the success of his operation, or the physician would watch with too much anxiety, the effect of his prescription on the patient to bestow much thought or sympathy on those present sufferings which he confidently anticipates will effect a permanent cure. So he calmly looks on, intent upon the result in the future, as he ignores to some extent the anguish of the passing hour. But I pray you not to think that it is exactly so with God.

Of course, in a higher scale, He has all the wisdom of the physician and He views our afflictions that we now endure in the light of that hereafter when He will heal all our diseases, give unto us beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Still, He does not steel His heart to the immediate and the present trouble of His people, but, "Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him." I can understand the surgeon

looking at the patient, while causing him acute pain under the operation, with the bravery of a man whose nerves cannot easily be shaken. But the father must leave the room, he cannot bear it. The mother cannot look on—they are carried away with the immediate grief. And so it is with God, albeit that the splendor of His wisdom and His foreknowledge enable Him to see the end as well as the beginning, yet, believe me, like as a father is pitying his children, so the Lord is pitying them that fear Him. For it is in the present tense, and carries the idea of continuity. At this very moment He pities them that fear Him. Though He knows your trials will work for your good, yet He pities you. Though He knows that there is sin in you, which, perhaps, may require this rough discipline before you are sanctified, yet He pities you. Though He can hear the music of heaven, the songs and glees that will ultimately come of your present sighs and grief, yet He still pities those groans and wails of yours, for “He does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.” In all our distresses and present grief, He takes His share. He pities us as a father pities his children.

Let us look at the text, then, believing in its meaning, and not frittering it away by saying, “That is after the manner of men.” For again, I say, there is no other manner in which we can speak, and no other manner in which God Himself can speak if He means us to understand. There is doubtless some high and vast meaning which, like the covering cherub, stands high over all, but, for all that, I am but a child and cannot reach it. I am content with what I can reach; satisfied with what is obviously the meaning of this text, “Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him.”

Hear it, dear friends, first for your encouragement, and hear it next for your imitation. Hear it that you may be encouraged, God is not unfeelingly afflicting you, but He pities you. Hear it that you may be impelled to go into the world with

a like pitying eye. If you ever have to say a rough word in fidelity, or are required to utter a stern rebuke, do it after the manner of your heavenly Father, pitying even if you have to blame, and gently delivering the expostulation which it grieves you to have to deliver at all.

I am not tonight able to preach to you much by way of set discourse, for I am one of those children just now who needs his Father's pity. I half think He would have bade me go home, and not speak to you at all, had it not been that the sight of this assembly stirs my spirit, and makes it imperative that when you come together to hear, I should have something to say to you, therefore as best I can, I shall simply call attention to some things in our condition and our circumstances which make us resemble children towards whom God has pity.

Will you please observe on the outset, that the pity of the Lord extends to *all* those that fear Him. There are none of them that are not fit objects of His compassion—the very best and brightest of His saints, the brave heroes, the well-instructed fathers, the diligent workers, God pities you, my dear brethren. Will you take that home to yourselves, because there is a beautiful lesson of humility in so accounting ourselves as pitiable creatures in the eyes of the Lord, even when we are at our best estate. I have seen some brothers and sisters that really did not seem at all good subjects for pity, because they imagined that the very roots of sin had been eradicated out of their hearts. Their character and their conduct were akin to perfection in their own esteem. I forget how many weeks they had lived without a sin except they had some wandering thought once, but they could hardly remember or refer to that as a fault. Yes, but I venture to say I pity people that talk so. If they are God's children, all that God does with them is, He pities them, and well He may, for He says to Himself, "Poor dear creatures. How little they know of themselves, and how

different their estimate of perfection is from Mine.” He still pities them, and that is as far as He goes. I do not find Him admiring them or exalting and extolling them. The biggest child He has, the child that is most like His Father, and has learned most of Jesus, may come to this text and see himself depicted in it—“As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him.”

As for us who are not so big, and are still among His little children, I am sure the Lord first pities our *childish ignorance*. He is not angry with us, because we do not know everything, He is not angry with us because the little we do know we mostly turn topsy-turvy, upside down. He is not angry with us because what He has taught us we are very apt to forget by reason of our fickle memory. No, He pities us. Schoolmasters of the olden type used to think that the boys must do all the lessons that were given them and learn everything that was contained in their school books, then they asked them questions which, if the pupils could answer, there would be no need for any tutors, but if the boys did not know the answers, there was nothing for them but a fierce word and a hard blow. That is not how fathers teach—true fathers, but when their children do not know, they tell them. If they cannot quite understand them, they watch their faces and they put the thing into another shape, and if the child has not got it then, they try again, and at last they find the keyhole of the child's understanding, and put the key in, and straightway the mind is opened, and the truth, like a precious treasure, is stowed therein. A father does not act like a schoolmaster, but he pities his children, and he is willing patiently to teach them.

Does the father expect his child to know as much as himself? Does the politician expect the little boy to understand the secrets of the Cabinet? Does the tradesman expect his child to come into his shop and perceive the intricacies of his

business? Certainly not, and when the child makes many mistakes, at which others laugh and mock and make some bitter jest till the tears rise in his tender eyes, and roll down his little cheeks, the father feels the affront and pities his child. He too smiles at the strange things, the freaks of the child's mind, yet there is not an atom of scorn in that smile. He loves him too much to ever think of him in that way, and he goes on to teach him more. "Why did you tell your child that piece of information twenty times?" asks one. "Why," said the mother, "I told him twenty times, because when I had told him nineteen times he did not know it, so I went on to twenty times." And that is how God does with us. He has taught some of us nineteen times, and we do not know it, so He will teach us twenty times, for He pities us.

Oh, if He were to treat us as some lads have been treated at schools—where they dismiss a boy as incorrigible, too dull, too stupid ever to shine—some of us would have been turned away long ago. But He takes us, dull scholars as we are, and He tires not of teaching, as He gently insinuates one truth after another—not too much at a time, for He says, "You cannot bear them now, though I have many things to say unto you"—and so by degrees He does get a little into us. Blessed be His name for that little! It is worth the entire world. One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see. I have got that drilled into me. To know Him, and to know something of the power of His resurrection, and something of conformity to His death—these are lessons we are going on to learn with a sweet prospect of being taught yet more and more, and never a fear of being dismissed because of our dullness, for "Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him."

Let us take a word of admonition from this instance of pity before we go any further. Do not let us think that we have not the privileges of children because we do not know as much as

more experienced saints, because we cannot engage in the devotion at prayer meetings, or conduct a Bible class, or perhaps can hardly understand the creed of the church well enough to give a clear account of it. Do not let us think our heavenly Father does not love us, that He will refrain from keeping His eye upon us, or cease to watch our growth in grace and in the knowledge of Christ until He shall have more fully instructed us. Do not let us begin to condemn those of God's children that do not know as much as we do. We have not got far ourselves. Still, there is a tendency in some to say, "Why, this cannot be genuine grace, for it is accompanied with such little knowledge." Well, now, if that suspicion shall lead you to give more instruction, it is well, but if it shall lead you to set aside the uninstructed one, it is ill. In the church of God it behooves us to have the same pity on the ignorant as our heavenly Father has shown towards us in our ignorance, and we ought to have even more, seeing He has no ignorance of His own, and we have much. Let us therefore be very compassionate and exceedingly pitiful towards those of our brethren who as yet know but little.

Another thing in which our heavenly Father shows Himself pitiful to us is in *our weakness*. Children cannot do much; they have but little strength, especially little children, too young, too helpless to run alone. The mother does not despise, she rather dotes on the babe whose little body is a burden she has to carry because it cannot walk. Her heart is not hardened against her infant because the wee baby is unable to help itself. Our heavenly Father knows our weaknesses. Some of you know something of your own lack of strength. You are bowed down under a sense of your infirmity tonight. Now, do not let your weakness lead you into any unbelief or mistrust of God. He knows our frame; He remembers that we are but dust. An infant's incapacity never excites a parent's ire. You, being evil,

know how to be tender with your offspring. How much more shall the Father of spirits sympathize with such weakness, as He knows we are all prone to experience. Possibly the weakness that distracts you comes from languor of body. I have been sometimes so sorely sick as scarcely able to pray, that is to say, not to express my desires in a consecutive prayer. And I remember one who said to me, “I appeal to you, as a father, were your child suffering from a fever, his mind wandering, and his speech delirious, would you reproach him because he did not address you just as he has been accustomed to do when he was in health?” I felt I should have rather commiserated his sickness than complained of his frenzy. Neither will our heavenly Father, deviate from the instincts that He has implanted in the nature of His creatures, and revealed to us as an illustration of His own emotions toward those that fear Him.

If you who have been accustomed to guide your class in their studies, cannot find anything instructive to teach them, or if you are a minister, should it seem to you that the tide runs out when you looked for your thoughts to flow freely, and that the words fall frozen when you hoped they would fire volleys from your lips, there may be some rational solution for your languor. If there is any wrong in your heart or in your habits, you may well blame yourselves, but if it is pure weakness—whether it comes from the body or from the mind that you are weary, disorganized, depressed and bowed down—do not think of aggravating your distress by self-reproach, but hear the text say, “Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.” Some of our brethren seem to think we are made of cast iron. They would have us preach all day and all night long. At times they are so thoughtless as to make use of very bitter language when some servant of Christ cannot, through physical or mental weakness, do all they want of him.

“So-and-so does it,” they say. A man in perfect health and strength may joyfully accomplish what another man cannot even think of undertaking. So are God’s servants misjudged by the sterner sort, but they are not misjudged by God, for He pities the weakness of His people, and blames them not. I wish I could speak a word that would be encouraging to any here that would go about Christ’s service if they could, but cannot. I remember John Bunyan’s little picture of the man that is sent for the doctor, and he has to go on a horse and make all the haste he can, but the horse is a sorry jade, and cannot go very fast. “Oh,” he says, “look at the man, how he kicks, how he tugs at the bridle, and his master knows he would go if the horse would only carry him.” Under such circumstances the messenger could not surely be to blame. So, sometimes God sees the efforts of His servants to work for Him. Why, they would drive the church before them and pull the world behind them if they could. And if they do not seem to be able to do it, does He blame them? No, verily, but He pities the weakness of them that fear Him.

We will go a step further now. In children there is something much worse than ignorance and weakness, and that is their *childish follies*. There are some persons who have a great affection for children, and find great pleasure in being with them by the days together. I confess I find a larger portion of pleasure when they are out of the way. Perhaps it is because I need quiet and stillness that I am better able to bear with them a little at a time. But there are persons who seem to take a delight in all their childish pranks and games, and all their romps and frolic. Well, that is good, and I hope you will have plenty of it, you that like it. But the father is the one who can bear with his children when other people cannot. I have occasionally been in houses where I have felt that I was glad the father could bear with them, for I did not feel inclined to

be very patient with their play myself, however proper I may think it for young people to be lively. And you know a father and mother will put up with a thousand little things in their children that strangers would frown at.

Those dear, kind mothers, with a little tribe about them, they do not seem wearied and worn out, and if anybody says, “Oh, look what he is doing.” “Ah, well,” says the mother, “he is only a boy.” “Oh, but see that girl.” “Oh, well, she is so young; she must have her little frolics.” There are all sorts of excuses made on their behalf, and it is right enough that it should be so. It is not weakness in the child, it is just childishness. And when we were children, we did the same, and others bore with us, and so parents bear with their children. But oh, how God our Father bears with us! We think we are very wise, it is highly probable that we are never such fools as when we think we are displaying our wisdom. We think we are pleasing God sometimes, and in that very act we are displeasing Him, though we know it not. There are sins in our holy things, oh, how strange must some of the things that we do seem to our great God! We have gotten so accustomed to them, we have seen them in others, we have come to put up with them in others, and others put up with them in us.

Now, we who talk sometimes about our doubts and fears, why, there must be much in them which must be very depressing to the mind of the great Father. Do we doubt Him? Do we distrust His promises? We try to make out that we do not, but if you sift it thoroughly, it does come to that. Oh, the Father knows that we do not mean it, that we shrink in a moment from the idea of making Him to be a liar, and if anybody else were to put forward the very doubt which we have been entertaining, we should be horrified with it. And I believe it is a great part of our heavenly Father's pity that He should thus look on us, and often construe what we do in such a kind

and tender way. You know how Jesus prayed for His murderers—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And the Son is very like the Father, our Father does the same with us, He forgives us because we "know not what we do." It was very beautiful of our Lord, even with Pilate to say, "He that delivered Me unto you has the greater sin." It was the best He could say for Pilate, which though his sin was great yet there was a greater. And our Father has all those kind thoughts ready; we may be sure, for His children's wild and wayward deeds. Jesus had them ready even for His most fierce and wicked adversaries. Yes, He pities our follies and bears with us still.

But children have something worse than follies; they have *faults to be forgiven*. Now, our Father pities the faults of His children, and He shows His pity by this fact, that He has provided for their cleansing, and He freely gives them the use of that provision, and readily forgives them their iniquities. A good child, when it has done wrong, is never satisfied until it gets to the father and says so, and asks the father's forgiveness. Some fathers, perhaps, think it wise to withhold the forgiving word for a little time, so may our great Father, but as a rule is it not wonderful how readily He forgives? He does for a little time, perhaps, make us smart under the sin for our good, but it is not often. As a rule, the kiss is on our cheek almost before the confession has left our lips. Oh, have we not gone to Him and we have thought, "He will chasten me for this. I may expect to be put in the dark, and to be without communion with Him for many days." But we have just ingenuously opened up our heart, and told Him that we grieved, and asked Him to make us even more grieved, that we might hate the fault, and never fall into it again. And almost at once He has said, "I have blotted out your sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud your iniquities; go and sin no more."

Do you not think that Peter ought to have been thrown out of the church a good long while after denying his Master with oaths and cursing? Well, perhaps he would have if we had been consulted in the matter, but when Jesus Christ was here on earth, by a kind look or a gentle word He could set very crooked things straight. So we see Peter in company with John and the rest of the brethren within two or three days of his committing that serious trespass. The Lord is very ready to forgive; it is the church that is unmerciful sometimes, but not the Master. He is always willing to receive us when we come to Him, and to blot out our transgression. Come along then, you that have erred and gone astray, you backsliders that are sensible of sin, you His children that did walk in the light but a few days ago, and have got into the dark by some sad slip, yet come along. You are very ready to forgive your children, are you not? Do you not remember, you that are too old to have them about the house, how readily in your younger days you picked up your little ones in your arms and said, “Dear child, do not cry any more, you must not do it again, but father fully forgives you this time”? Just so your heavenly Father waits to pick you up, and to press you to His bosom and say, “I have loved you with an everlasting love,” not “with a love that can soon be set aside by your fault.” “I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore I will blot out again your transgression, and set your feet on a rock, and strengthen you to sin no more.” Oh, it is a sweet, sweet thought—our Father pities us in our faults!

Go a step further. A father's pity tenderly *lifts up those that fall*. When your child falls down, as children are very apt to do, especially when they first begin to walk, do you not pity them? Is there a nasty cut across the knee, and it cries, the mother takes it up in her arms, directly, and she has some sponge and water to take the grit out of the wound, and she gives a kiss and

makes it well. I know mothers have wondrous healing lips! And sometimes, when God's servants do really fall, it is very lamentable, it is very sad, and it is well that they should cry. It is a pity that they should be willing to lie in the mire, but when they are up again, and begin crying, and the wound bleeds—well, let them not keep away from God, “For as a father pities his fallen children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him.” Have you come in here tonight with that cut knee of yours? I am sorry you should have fallen, but I am glad that our blessed Master is willing to receive you still. Come and trust in Him who is mighty to save, just as you did at first, and begin again tonight. Come along! Some of us have had many times to begin again. You do the same. If you are not a saint you are a sinner, and Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Put your trust in Him, and you shall find restoration, and maybe through that very fall you shall learn to be more careful, and from now on you shall walk more uprightly to His honor and glory.

But how the pity of a father comes out to a child in the matter of pain! With what exquisite tenderness *a child's pains are soothed* by a parent! It is very hard to stand by the bedside and see a dear child suffer. Have not some of you felt that you would gladly take your children's pains if they might be restored? You have one dear one at home now, the tears are in your eyes as I mention it—a life of suffering she has. Well, it may be others of you have children who have mental troubles, the body is healthy, but the little one has a fret and a worry. I hope you sometimes have seen your children weeping on account of sin, it is a blessed grief, and the sooner it comes, the better. In such a grief as that, as indeed in all others, I am quite sure you pity your children. So your Father pities you. Broken heart, God's heart is longing to heal you. Weeping, weeping for your transgressions, the Father longs to clasp you to His bosom. Tried child of God, you that are often despondent and always

ailing, God would not send this to you if there were not a necessity for it, and in sending it He shares it as far as this text goes, and it goes blessedly far, for He pities you. Sometimes hard-hearted persons do not pity those that suffer, and some forms of suffering do not awaken sympathy, but all the sufferings of God's people touch the heart of Jesus, and sympathy comes to them at once. I know some of you say, "I am quite alone in the world, and I have much sorrow." Please revise that hard saying! You are like your Master, of whom it is written that He said, "You shall leave Me alone: yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." Your Father is with you. I wish you had some Christian friend to speak with you as a companion, but in the absence of such a social confidant there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother, and there is One above who is a Father to you. Oh, believe it, there is no poverty, there is no reproach, there is no sorrow of heart, there is no pain of body in this world among them that fear God, but what the Lord sees it, and knows all about it, and has a pity to them that endure it.

Still passing on, our children have our pity *when anybody has wronged them*. I have heard say that there are some men that you might insult, almost with impunity, and should you even give them a blow they would stop to ask the reason before showing any resentment, but if you put a hand on their children, you shall see the father's blood come up into his face, and the most patient man will, all of a sudden, become the most passionate. There was a livid blue mark where you struck the child, and the father looks as though he could forgive you if that were on his own body, but on his child—no, that he cannot endure, he turns it over and over, and he cannot resist his indignation, that his child should be wantonly made to suffer. The wrongs of children call loudly for redress in the ears of every sensitive man or woman, but they are sure to awake a thrilling echo in a

father's heart. "And shall not God revenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him?" I tell you that He will avenge them speedily, though He bears long with the adversary. That cry of Milton's, when he prayed God to avenge God's elect among the valleys of Piedmont for all the accursed persecutions of the Church of Rome, was certainly heard and answered. Look at Spain to this day, degraded among the nations because she was chief in the army of inquisitors, and crushed out the word of God from her midst. She cannot rise; the blood of saints is on her. And other nations, too, that have shed the blood of the righteous like water have had to smart for it. That revolution in France, when blood flowed at the guillotine, was God's reply to St. Bartholomew, for He remembered it, and took vengeance for His saints, and so He will till the end of the world shall come. There is no wrong done to His people but it is registered in God's archives. "He that touches you touches the apple of My eye." Christ seemed to sit still in heaven till He saw the blood of His saints shed, and then He stood up as in indignation when they stoned Stephen. You remember how He cries, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute *Me?*" It was Jesus that suffered, though His saints were made to die. Leave, then, your wrongs with God. "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord," and let your reply be always gentleness and kindness towards those who hate you for righteousness' sake.

And now, once more, the father will pity his children so as not only to set right their wrongs, but to *remove his children's dreads*. There are some people in the world that seem to take delight in frightening children with old bogey stories so that they hardly dare go out at night, but a kind father, if he finds his child frightened so, explains it all to him—he does not like to see him blanched with fear or haunted with terror. It may be that some here present are suffering just now because they are

sorely afraid. Are any of you under a dread of some boding evil, as though the dark shadow of a calamity you cannot define were flitting before your eyes? Be sure of this, your heavenly Father pities you. There are some of our hymns that always speak of death as associated with pains and groans and agonizing strife. Very much of that is old bogey—

“Imagination’s fool and error’s wretch,
Man makes a death which nature never made;
Then on the point of his own fancy falls,
And feels a thousand deaths in fearing one.”

How many of God’s people have we seen die without pains or groans or dying strife! I do remember one who used to be all her life subject to fear of death. She retired as usual to bed one night, and when they went to call her in the morning, there she lay with a sweet smile upon her face, she had gone to heaven in her sleep, it was evident she never knew anything at all about it. Are God’s people by their observation of other saints driven to conclude that death is always the terrible thing the world says it is? I think not. There may be some whom God puts to bed in the dark, as we sometimes do our children, but usually He takes the candle with Him and sits and talks with His child till he falls asleep, and wakes up, and there he is among the angels. God kisses the souls of His saints out of the bodies—

“One gentle sigh, the fetter breaks:
We scarcely can say, ‘they’re gone!’
Before the ransomed spirit takes
Her mansion near the throne.”

Go to your heavenly Father and tell Him you are frightened, and He has ways of taking away these fears, for though they may be ridiculous to some, a child's dreads are never too frivolous for the sympathy of a loving father, but He meets them as if there were some great reality in them, and so sets them aside. Whatever then your need, your woe, your grief, fly away to your great Father's mercy seat and spread them there, and He will give you comfort, and always believe from this night forward that God pities all them that fear Him, and whatever He sees of weakness in their nature and of sorrow in their lot He will help them. So may you find it now and evermore, for Christ's sake. Amen.

1651 A DELUSION DISPELLED – EZEK. 14:20

A Sermon Delivered
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

Though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, says the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness.

— Ezekiel 14:20

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Jeremiah 5; Ezekiel 14]

WE ARE TOLD in the opening verse of this chapter that certain of the elders of Israel came to the prophet and sat before him. You need not ask who these elders were, or from where they came, because it is evident enough they were not a deputation from the Jews who were left in Judah and Jerusalem. But they were individuals of distinction from among the exiles of Chebar. That they came to inquire of the prophet of the Lord we gather from the answer that came to them by the word of the Lord. And we might also infer from the matter of the terrible denunciations that were uttered something at least of the manner of inquiry they proposed. The men were downright hypocrites, followers of the false prophets who are exposed in the previous chapter as seeing vanity and divination, and then saying, “Jehovah says,” though Jehovah had not sent them.

Now they come, these elders, to interview the true prophet of the Lord, and before they have time to state their errand, the word of the Lord confronts them with a lifelike portrait of their

own characters. “These men have set up their idols in their heart, and put up the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them?” For persons who were idolaters at heart to ask counsel of the living God, as if they would learn His will, though they defied His law, was a most insulting mockery. The thought which seems to have nestled in their breasts and prompted their visit was this, after all the exposure that Ezekiel has made of the wickedness of the land and of its inhabitants, may it not still be consistent with the mercy of the Lord to spare the city, as He would have spared the city of Sodom at the intercession of Abraham, for the sake of the few righteous men that remained in it? The answer, as you are aware, was an emphatic “No.” A reference to the 26th chapter of Leviticus, and a rehearsal of the four judgments which should work the desolation, stand associated with the protest, which is repeated again and again, each time, it seems to us, with more vehement force—“Though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, says the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness.”

Now, my main objective this evening will be to assert, to illustrate and to enforce this one distinct feature in the moral government of God. In all the procedures of divine judgment the principle of individual responsibility can never be relaxed. Hence the need of personal piety—the absolute necessity that men and women should pray for themselves—that each one should repent for himself, that each one should believe for himself, and that each one should in his own proper person be born again by the effectual operation of the Spirit of God. No proxy in these matters is possible. Sponsors in religion are a wicked superstition, their use degrades the minds of men and profanes the worship of God, and they ought to be forever done away with. I charge you, as you love God and your own

souls, and the souls of others, sooner die than stand sponsor for child or man, for it is a sin, a mockery, an offense before high heaven. Every man must take heed to his own soul. “Let each man prove his own work...for each man shall bear his own burden,” and every one of us must give an account for himself at the judgment seat of Christ.

Among the various shifts and schemes for taking comfort without a satisfactory title, or a plausible reason, the idea adopted by some that the righteousness of their friends may be of some use to them is not the least pernicious. They are the children of eminently gracious people. “Surely,” they say, “*we* cannot be lost.” They are connected with those whose name is known, and whose memory is fragrant in Christian society. They were born and brought up in a house dedicated by family prayer; they have been cradled and nurtured in the midst of godliness. They readily believe that those who live in the back slums, and have grown up to be wanton and willful, depraved and dishonest, will certainly perish, but can it be that those who have walked in the paths of morality and observed the ordinances of outward religion should be cast away? They scarcely think that it could be consistent with propriety to resist their claims to some discriminating consideration. Though they do not say as much in words, yet they secretly flatter themselves with the idea that the godliness of their ancestry and the scrupulous integrity of their parents will be enough to shelter them from responsibility.

There are others, to mark a lighter shade in self-deception, who indulges a hope that the prayers of their dear ones will be heard for them, although they never pray for themselves. They fall back in time of need upon the belief that surely their mother’s prayers will be answered on their behalf, or their wife’s petitions will bring down a blessing upon them. They do not embody the notion in words, I wish they did, for if people

were to place such thoughts in black and white, they would never like to acknowledge them, their folly would be too palpable. They entertain a hazy notion that because they have been so often prayed for, a blessing must come to them sooner or later. They will not awaken themselves to seek the mercy of the Lord, or quit their sins and lay hold on Christ to obtain the promise of pardon and peace, but they vainly dream that something mysterious will happen to them one of these days in answer to good people's prayers. In fact, some of them eagerly ask the prayers of the godly, though they never pray to God for themselves. My text is a stern rebuke for any who have taken themselves to either of these refuges of lies. I want to sound an alarm and drive them out of their hiding places. Oh, that God may be pleased to make His own word effectual to this end! "Though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it as I live, says the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness."

Now, it cannot be denied that there is great power in godliness, and a mighty prevalence in the intercessions of godly people to bring down rich blessings upon men. You are perfectly right in seeking the prayers of Christian friends. Why, even the apostle Paul said, in the name of the entire sacred ministry, "Brethren, pray for us." You can hardly ask for a choicer favor from the servants of God than that they should pray for you. But certain circumstances may entirely neutralize the prayers of the godly. Such circumstances were present in the case of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah in Jeremiah's day. They went on so far in idolatry and all manner of vice that God said that He would not hear Moses and Samuel, though they stood before Him to plead on their behalf. He told Jeremiah that he might as well cease to weep and pray, for He would never hear him for that people, and here by Ezekiel He declares

that if so wonderful a trio as Noah, and Daniel, and Job should join in intercession He would not regard even them.

And just so it is at this hour, if men continue in their sin, if, after hearing the gospel, they refuse it, if they persist in rejecting it, if they stifle conscience, if they silence the voice within, if they perniciously resolve to indulge their lusts, and will not repent and turn to God—then the excellence of their friends will rather aggravate than make amends for their guilt, and the prayers of their friends will be so utterly nullified and made of no effect, that nothing but the dread sentence will avail them—they must perish. They have not personally believed in Christ and accepted Him as their Mediator, therefore they must perish. They have dissipated the last vestige of hope by rejecting the only way of salvation, and they must perish. Though they come of a line of saints, and in their veins there runs the blood of the faithful, they must perish. Though they have the tradition of a sound faith, handed down from generation to generation, and though the escutcheon that has descended to them from holy ancestors is free from blot, yet if they refuse Christ they must perish. And though they have been born and bred, cradled and cared for, where holy hymns make up their lullaby, yet if they give not their own hearts to Christ, but set up idols in their hearts, they must perish—perish miserably with their own iniquity upon their heads. Was not Ishmael the son of Abraham? Yet he came not into the covenant. Was not Esau the child of Isaac? Yet he obtained not the inheritance. Birth, blood, and family count for nothing in this matter.

Thus there are two propositions, which, as God shall help me, I will endeavor to set plainly before your eyes. First, *the righteousness of the godliest cannot be of use for the ungodly*. And secondly, *the prayers of the greatest intercessors cannot help if men persist in their unbelief*.

I. First, THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE GODLIEST CANNOT AVAIL FOR THE UNGODLY.

We have to prove this, and we do so, first, by referring you to our text, and asking you to read it for yourselves. Mark how the anger of the Lord kindles, and how the words are launched forth like hot thunderbolts from the lips of the Most High. The statement is clear, the supposition is startling, but the oath that seals the oracle of heaven appalls us. A coincidence that was not likely to occur is imagined to put the utmost strain on the delineation, and to give language a stress that cannot be surpassed. As a matter of fact, we are told that if Noah, Daniel and Job were in the midst of Jerusalem, yet their conjoined virtues would not be of any use to save any but themselves. I wish I could help you to realize the picture as it must have flashed before the vision of the seer. Three saints who were not contemporaries, for their lives on earth were passed in distant centuries and different environments; meet together in a season of terrible emergency. The sacred annals of those days knew no names more illustrious, no stars that shone more brightly, than Noah, Daniel, and Job. Their sympathies are all excited, their hearts are in unison, and their prayers blend together as they bow before the altar. You look; you listen, in trembling suspense, as you cast a glance at the miserable inhabitants of the doomed city, and consider the fate of those captives who are languishing in a land far away. With what measure of acceptance will those passionate appeals for mercy be heard? Soon, the verdict comes from the throne. They deliver their own souls by their righteousness, and no more. Not one of them saves so much as his own son or his own daughter by his supplications. What a wail comes up as the inexorable decree is pronounced! But the echo that lingers longest in my ears is that awful oath—“As I live says the Lord God.”

Next to this, I am going to ask you to inspect more narrowly the portraits of these men of God, who are presumed to have stood counsel for the defendants, and to have occasioned so much astonishment, because with all their special pleading they signally lost their case. *Noah* is the very pattern of godly fear, a model of that “fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom,” just as Abraham was a model of faith, and the father of the faithful. Moved with fear, he built an ark for the saving of his house. Heedless of the ridicule of the many about him, he built a huge ship on dry land. He became a preacher of righteousness, and though few, if any, were converted by that preaching, he persevered for 120 years, obediently doing what God commanded him, for a testimony against the ungodly. Scarcely can we find a better man than this second father of the human race from whom we have all sprung.

Next to him we have mention made of *Daniel*. He was alive at the time when Ezekiel wrote, a young man, I suppose, of about 30 years of age. It is very singular that he should be sandwiched in, as it was, between Noah and Job—two men of the olden world. He must have been highly esteemed in his own generation. Ezekiel, moved by the Holy Spirit, groups him with those whom history had canonized. He was a man greatly beloved of God, and no doubt by his contemporaries he was very much appreciated. Sterling virtue and an elevation of character above the common standard of a good man would be indispensable to his taking rank as one of so remarkable a triumvirate. And when you think of him—of his integrity in youth, when he would not defile himself with the king’s meat—of his steadfastness in prayer in riper years, when, with his window open toward Jerusalem, he prayed as he had done before, though by a statute of the realm the penalty of making supplication to the God of the Hebrews was death, What a

model of thorough manliness he is! There is majesty about Daniel. He is the John of the Old Testament. He is the seer who saw visions of God like the chosen one of Patmos. The combination of qualities that are embodied in such a man is worth your study. So chivalrous was his sense of duty that he is honored by kings! So holy is he in his conscience, as well as in his habits, that the King of kings reveals to him the secrets of His government! There is none like Daniel, “Yet,” says God, “though in addition to Noah, Daniel stood before Me, his righteousness would suffice only for himself, and could not be of the least profit to anyone else.”

To complete the trio, there is *Job*, to whom we have infallible testimony that he was perfect and upright. Satan himself could find no fault with his character, though with fiendish malice he insinuated a sinister motive for Job's scrupulous integrity. “Does Job serve God for nothing? Have You not set a hedge about him and all that he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse You to Your face.” You remember that he did not curse God, but he blessed Him, and his faith triumphed over his fretfulness even on the dunghill of his poverty, when he was covered with sores and filled with anguish. Surely Job is a model of excellence. “You have heard of the patience of Job.” “My servant Job,” was the honorable designation that the Almighty gave him. Moreover, He bestowed on him high praise and a double blessing at the end of his trial.

Now, if we had any one of these three men to plead for us, we should look upon him as putting a great weight in the scale. If we had for our next door neighbor, or brother, or father, either of these—if there were any transference of righteousness from one man to another, we should hope to shade ourselves

under the wings of Noah, or Daniel, or Job. But here the Lord declares that if the whole three were put together, they should not save son or daughter. No, dear friends, “*You* must be born again,” *you* must be made righteous, each one for himself, or else if you had all these friends at court, which you have not, they would be unable to avert the course of justice, or obtain for you the slightest favor. The text puts it plainly—“Though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it as I live, says the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness.”

This truth may be further substantiated by observing the course of Providence as regards the things of this life. Could the merits of friends and parents secure the salvation of their relatives or children, we must expect to see “the son or the daughter” of a righteous man screened from the full punishment of his own misdeeds, but we have evidence that such is not the case. Let me give you Scriptural illustrations. Moses was faithful in his entire house as a servant. He had a brother Aaron, not so great a man as himself, but still an eminently holy man. Listen, you that are the sons of gracious men, Aaron had two sons, and the father’s dignity rested upon them, and they became priests of the Most High God. But, do you know what became of them? Drinking too much wine—alas, what a snare is that!—they entered into the Holy Place of God with strange fire, and the fire of God consumed Nadab and Abihu, though they were the sons of Aaron. And what did Aaron say about them? We read this, “And Aaron held his peace.” He could say nothing. He had to bow his head before God. He knew that it must be—that if even a child of God’s high priest pollutes the holy place, the fire of the Lord must come forth against him. Thus you see that Aaron could not overshadow his own sons and save them in the day of the Lord’s anger.

Take another case equally sad. David had a favorite son, who became the cruel adversary of his own father, and in open rebellion attempted to usurp his throne. Yet even in the tumult of battle, the king would have spread the aegis of protection over his own child. "Beware," he said to his generals, "that none touch the young man Absalom." You remember how he fled from the fray, but fled in vain, a just retribution overtook him. The locks of his hair in which he gloried were caught in the low branches of an oak and there he hung. Then, as you hear David cry, "O Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, my son, my son, would God I had died for you!" you see that the righteousness of David could not deliver his son Absalom even as to this life.

If you needed other proofs, I would give the instance of Judas, which is greatly to the point, not in the matter of relationship, but in the matter of association. Judas consorted with eleven of the princes of the church of God, for such I call them, now that they have gone up to their thrones. No, more, Judas consorted with the Master Himself and dipped in the same dish with our Redeemer. Yet, you see, the righteousness of eleven apostles could not cover Judas. And because he did not believe in Jesus, neither did the righteousness of his Master cover him. And so this man perished in his own iniquity.

These examples I have given you from the Bible. Were I to try and turn over the pages of my recollection, I could give you many miserable proofs that the father's righteousness does not cover the son. I am afraid I shall touch a very tender string with friends here present who in their own sons have sad proof that it is so. I have seen the preacher of the gospel whose son was committed to prison. I have known the father to be a minister of Christ and his son a ringleader in infidelity, or a chief actor in things too filthy and profane to be mentioned here. Full many a child of godly parents has in this life brought himself

to beggary, to disgrace, to disease, to death. It is a sad fact, but it is so. There may have been, perhaps, grave fault at home. That I cannot tell—God knows—but so it has been that men who, to the best of our judgment, were not only godly, but eminently so, have, nevertheless, had the wretched lot—to see their sons and daughters given up to work iniquity with both hands greedily. God save you from such a sorrow, but the recurrence of these facts goes to show that the godliest man's righteousness cannot be of use, even, for son or daughter.

What need, however, that I multiply proofs? The scales of justice must be poised with an equal hand. Partiality is out of the question. God is no respecter of persons. Were it otherwise, personal obedience to the will of God could be dispensed with. There would be in this world a number of chartered libertines who would plead a mother's godliness or a father's Christian character as a setoff for their own indifference or profanity, as if they had a special license to live as they like because their parents were godly. Would you have it so if you could? I would not. I should think it a most dangerous institution. Thank God, His divine justice has never given immunity to any vice. If a man eats sour grapes his teeth shall be set on edge. A spendthrift shall rue the course he has run, and shall beg bread, even though his father was a saint of the innermost sanctuary. If a man indulges foul passions, he shall suffer for it in his own body; let his father be as gracious as he may. If a man puts his finger into the fire, it will burn *him*, if he tempts the flood in time of danger, it will drown him. You may groan to think he was the child of so good a man, but the laws of nature are not to be trifled with. If you act contrary to them they will be contrary to you.

Relationship, which is but an accidental circumstance, is not to be confused with religion. That the righteousness of one man could compensate for the recklessness of another man is

a monstrous conceit. What if I am, as I thank God I am, the son of His handmaid? I dare not to presume on that. What if my father is a minister of the gospel? What if my grandfather preached the gospel? I thank God that such Grace was given to them, but there is nothing in that upon which I dare presume. I think the meanest pride in all the world is the pride of ancestry, for how on earth can a man have any credit due to him for a contingency which never could be at his own disposal? It must be a matter of God's own dispensation, and if he has received it, why does he glory as though he had not received it? To suppose that grace comes with ancestry would be a supposition exactly opposite to the declaration of the Spirit of God by John, where he says of the godly, "which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." There must be a birth by the Spirit of God, or the first birth will be nothing whatever to our advantage. However well-born at first, you must be born again.

If the righteousness of one man could excuse the unrighteousness of another man, then the great principle of responsibility would be reversed. You and I, who were born in the midst of Christian associations, are responsible for the light which we receive. If we sin, we cannot sin so cheaply as others. If a man transgresses against the holy example of parents, he scores seven for every sin to what another would have done who had been trained up under vicious surroundings. Assuredly he is not a less sinner, but a greater sinner who, being born in the midst of godliness, ventures to depart from the good way, transgress the sacred precepts, and refuses the Savior. That is the principle of Scripture—to whom much is given, of him much shall be required, and we have to say daily to you children of the godly that, if you fall, your exaltation by your privileges will cause you a more awful fall than the fall of others. We say to such as you, "Woe unto you, Bethsaida; woe unto

you, Chorazin; woe unto you, Capernaum. You have seen the mighty works of Christ, which, if others had seen, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes, and if you repent not, woe unto you!” Such is the teaching of the word of God. But the opposite hypothesis that the goodness of one individual can compensate for the badness of another is utterly hollow, not to say grossly vicious.

Painful though it is, dear friends, I must carry the assertion a step further. The righteousness of good men has not availed to save their relatives from the terrors of the world to come. Instances of this come uncalled for to our recollection. Begin at the beginning. There is Cain. Who is his brother? Abel. Abel is a man whose faith is acceptable with God. Does that save Cain? No, he was “of that wicked one and slew his brother. And why did he slay him? Because his own works were evil and his brother’s righteous.” Cain, where are you tonight? Are you sitting here, and do you dream that your brother Abel now with God can by any means bless you? That must not be. Dispel the delusion. The opening chapter of history refutes it. The first two sons that were born to Adam depart from earth in different directions. Look again at Ishmael. His father, Abraham, the father of the faithful, said, “O that Ishmael might live before You!” Yet Ishmael becomes the very type of the children of nature who do not inherit the blessing that belongs to the children of promise.

Look at Esau, born at the same birth with Jacob, children of a godly father, yet we read of Esau that he was a profane person. The godliness of holy Isaac does not save Esau. Look at Hophni and Phinehas, priests of God by office, but sons of Belial by character. Their father Eli, with all his faults, was a man who feared God. Yet as for these sons of his, they died in their sins, from which, no sacrifice nor offering, could purge them. Look at Jehoram, his father Jehoshaphat was a truly

gracious man, though, alas, he turned aside, joined kinship with Ahab, and married his son to the daughter of that woman Jezebel. And ah me, how many a young man is ruined by some such perilous alliance! For money, for business, or for social position they are wedded to the ungodly. Some of you sell your daughters to the devil that they may make a respectable match, when you know that this unequal yoking is forbidden by gospel precept. I am ashamed of Christian people who lend their countenance to this breach of the Lord's commandment. In this world there is blight on such unions, and in the world to come—well, over that you would wish to draw the veil. The life of Jehoram was evil. His death was painful and premature. His end was without hope, yet he was a son of Jehoshaphat who did that which was right in the sight of the Lord.

How tenaciously men will cling to the idea that godly ancestors can help them, is illustrated from that parable of our Lord in which He tells us of the rich man who lifted up his eyes in hell and cried, "*Father Abraham.*" As a descendant of Abraham, he looked for pity and relief, even in the place of torment. Ah, but he failed to obtain a drop of water to cool his tongue by that plea. Take the warning to yourselves, sirs, I beseech you. It does not matter of whom you may be descendants; they cannot relieve the pains of hell for you. Unless you yourselves have personal faith and a personal renewal of heart, though you had Noah, Daniel, and Job to take your part—"As I live, says the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness."

II. Now I come to our second proposition. **THE PRAYERS OF THE GREATEST INTERCESSORS CANNOT AVAIL IF MEN PERSIST IN THEIR UNBELIEF.** God forbid that I should discourage any of you from praying for your parents, your children, and your friends. Let us never leave off praying for

them. But if any man in this place is sitting comfortably in his seat, saying, “My wife prays for me, my mother prays for me, my children pray for me, it will be all right with me somehow, their prayers will suffice for me, without any penitence or faith on my part,” I should like to touch him on the shoulder, and whisper in his ear these words, “Though Noah, Daniel, and Job were the intercessors, they could deliver none but their own souls.”

Noah was a man of prayer undoubtedly. Still, there was not a single person saved by Noah’s prayers except those that went into the ark, and if God would give to us, His people, everything that we ask for, yet we would not ask Him to save you if you will not believe in Christ. If you set up your idols in your heart and keep the stumbling block of your lust before your eyes, we cannot, we dare not pray for you that you may be saved contrary to the gospel.

Daniel was mighty in prayer, but all that his prayers ever did could not save Israel from the fatal results of the follies to which they clung. Jerusalem was destroyed, notwithstanding the prayers of Daniel, and the Jews are scattered among all lands, notwithstanding that the holy prophet pleaded for the prosperity of Zion. We can only pray according to the will of God, and our prayers must be that you may be saved in the Lord’s own appointed way, we cannot ask Him to change His way for you.

Job prayed for his friends, and his friends were forgiven, but, note it well, not without a sacrifice. They had to bring seven bullocks and seven rams and offer up for themselves a burnt offering before the prayer of Job on their behalf was heard. If you will bring a sacrifice for yourselves—if you will present Christ as your sacrifice, then will our prayers go with yours and you shall be blessed. Had they offered no sacrifice,

Job's prayers could not have availed for them. You must believe in Jesus with a faith distinctly your own.

Were the whole church on earth to lift up one continuous prayer and persevere in it from generation to generation, it could not save one unbelieving man. While he remains in unbelief, the wrath of God abides on him. If you buoy yourself up with a deceitful hope that it is different, you will presently sink down in blank despair. What a man of prayer Moses was when he held back God's hand, till the Lord cried, "Let Me alone, that I may destroy them." But Moses besought the Lord God with urgent prayer, and he prevailed. Yet even Moses did not avert the sentence pronounced on the generation which he had brought out of Egypt. Their carcasses all fell in the wilderness, save Joshua and Caleb. Nor could these two righteous men preserve one single person beyond themselves. All the intercession of Moses could not save an unbelieving generation, because they believed not, they all died. As for Samuel, you will remember how he mourned for Saul, whom God had put away, till God said to him, "How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him?" He had to give it up and go and anoint David. The prayers of the devout prophet could not save the disobedient king. Oh, how this should take any of you off from a vain confidence in the prayers of others, and lead you to pray for yourselves, and look to Christ for yourselves.

A parent's prayers are a sad pretext for a child's presumption. Striving together in prayer, saint with saint, there is a mighty power. But what strife is that when the soul we seek is struggling to be free from all restraint only to plunge deeper into sin. Remember, beloved friends, that all the prayers of godly men put together cannot alter the rule of the kingdom. And what is the rule of the kingdom? Here is one of the rules, "Except you are converted, and become as little children, you

shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Suppose Noah and Daniel and Job, and Moses and Samuel and Jeremiah—those six—should pray God to let a man go to heaven without being born from above and renewed by the Spirit of God, would that be of any use? Do you think the constitution of the kingdom of heaven would be altered for their asking? Oh no. The will of God is not affected by the whims of men. Well, here is another rule of the kingdom, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; he that believes not shall be damned.” Now if Noah, Job, and Daniel were all to pray that this statute might be repealed, and a resolution more consonant with the caprice of mortal men should be substituted in its place, do you think the appeal would be allowed? Surely our cries to God must not be complaints of His decrees. Our petitions must be submissive to His word, not subversive of His wisdom. He will not change the ordinances of His kingdom because men are stubborn. Like the laws of the Medes and Persians, His decrees can never be altered. They stand fast forever, and they exclude forever from heaven those who abide in unbelief.

No, sirs, if you are not reconciled to God, you cannot have fellowship with Him, if you are not made meet to be partakers of the inheritance, you cannot enter into the enjoyment of it, in the atmosphere of heaven you could not breathe, for without holiness no man can see God. If you believe not in Jesus Christ, you must die in your sins.

Remember that all the prayers of godly men cannot alter the nature of sin, and if they cannot alter the nature of sin, then they that continue in it must perish. If we were to hold a prayer meeting to prevent a person from being burnt who would put his hand into the fire, would that be of any use? If a man who cannot swim will persist in leaping into the river, what is the use of my asking you all to pray God to preserve his life? If a man puts a bottle of acid to his lips and drinks it, what is the

use of our coming together to pray that his life may be spared, when the deadly poison is destroying it? If he drives a dagger into his heart he must die, unless God is pleased to reverse that order, which, according to the poet, “is heaven’s first law.” There is a way of salvation—“Believe in Jesus Christ and live,” if you will not have that, where are you, my friend? Are you such a fool as to sit there and say, “I shall be saved by my wife’s prayers”? Your wife’s prayers will rather seal your doom. They will rise up in judgment against you. That you were so much prayed for implies that you were admonished and entreated at a most loving rate. You will not be able to say, “No man cares for my soul.” A mother’s prayers will ring in your ears, and excite remorse when repentance is no more possible. The cries of the lost will be more terrible than the recollection of her tears and agony for you. Oh, remember this. Sin is fire, and it must burn. Sin is hell, and it must torment the man who continues in it. There is no help for it. Pray as much as ever we like, if you do not get out of sin, you cannot get out of destruction. If you do not find pardon through our Lord Jesus you must be punished.

Moreover, the prayers of good men cannot alter the conditions of the eternal future, so long as the present abides the same. This must be tangible to any sane judgment. The palace of luxury and the prison of penal servitude are but faint pictures of heaven and hell. What is heaven? The abode of perfect spirits washed in the blood of the Lamb. The right of admission, how can it be obtained? There are qualifications that cannot be dispensed with. And there are disqualifications that cannot be denied. As British subjects, we have a right of petition to our Queen, but of what use would that be, if with a required number of signatures, we could ask her Majesty to confer the Victoria Cross on a burglar? Or how can you suppose that God will receive a rebel amongst His loyal

courtiers? It cannot be. And what is the meaning or purpose of hell but this—that he that will have sin must have sorrow? He that will hate God must be miserable. There is no law more immutable than that “to be good is to be happy,” and to be bad is sooner or later to be wretched. It must be so. Trust not, therefore, to the prayers of others, but come to Christ for yourselves, that you may be cleansed from sin and made right for heaven.

Perhaps you say, “Sir, I did not think prayer would suffice to effect a change in my circumstances without a corresponding change in myself, but I thought that somehow by prayer, I should be compelled to believe and to repent.” Compelled to believe and to repent? Well, man, what sort of repentance and faith must that be which comes of compulsion? Surely that man’s heart is not sincere who says, “I hope to go to heaven, though it is against my own inclination.” You would gladly be made to hate sin against your will? That is strange, are you to be made to love righteousness against your own liking? I have heard of fathers saying that their daughters should marry So-and-so, but I defy them to make them love those with whom they have no feeling. No, these matters are far too delicate to be managed by coercion. It cannot be.

Neither does the Holy Spirit Himself employ force to compel those who are unwilling. He has a power that is quite congruous with the freedom of the will by which He sweetly turns the mind and will by blessed argument and illumination. By enlightening the understanding, He controls the will. But, believe me; you will never be lugged into heaven by your ears. You will never be strapped down and carried to heaven as we see drunken women carried to the stationhouse on a stretcher. Have you ever fancied that such would be the case? Has such an absurd idea ever entered into your head, that somehow or other, without you ever seeking it, you will be taken up by some

celestial surgery and chloroformed into glory? It will not be so.

Turn to this Book and see. How did the prodigal get to his father's house? Did his father asphyxiate him and make him insensible, and then strap him down and carry him there? Not at all, but first he was hungry, and he tried to fill his belly with the husks, but he could not, and he became more hungry still, and then he said, "I will arise, and go unto my father," and he went to his father. Yes, it was all of grace, but still he arose and came unto his father. It was all of eternal love, but he did leave the swine and seek his home. It was of infinite pity, but he did think, and he did will to go. And what is more, he did go to his father's house. He did all that, and then when he was a great way off, his father met him.

Now, do believe me, though I always preach free, rich, sovereign grace with all my heart, I never understood, and never shall understand, that God treats us like logs of wood and blocks of marble, and cleaves or chips us about as if we had no life, or will, or intelligence. It is not so and only fools think in such a fashion. You are men, not dumb driven cattle. You will not be saved like asses, but like men. You will not be saved like horses and mules, and cats, but like men and women who can think. You will have to think, and you will have to hate your sin, and you will have to cry for mercy, and you will have to believe in Christ, and if you do not, you will perish. All the prayers that have ever been poured out can be of no use to save you except through your being brought to trust your Savior, and hate your sin, and become obedient to His will.

Do you believe this, dear friends? It may be that out of this large congregation there are only a few to whom these questions are particularly appropriate, but I thought that I would leave the 99 sheep in the wilderness—there are plenty of sweet grasses for you in the quiet places of the word—and I would go after some that have gone astray in this direction, for

I long to find you. Oh that the blessed Spirit would convince you of your sin, and lead you to say, “I have played the fool exceedingly. I have been trusting to a privilege which I ought to have used for another purpose. Now, I will seek God, and I will yield to the blessed gospel and put my trust in Jesus.” Remember, there is a righteousness which you can have—the righteousness of Jesus Christ which can cover you. Though Noah and Daniel and Job cannot deliver you, Jesus can. There is an intercession that can be heard for you—the intercession of one that lives and was dead, and now makes intercession for men, and is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him. Come unto God by Him, and His intercession is yours, and shall be your health, and His righteousness is yours, and shall be your covering. God grant it for the dear Redeemer’s sake. Amen and amen.

1652 THE SINGING PILGRIM – PS. 119:54

A Sermon Delivered
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage. — Psalm 119:54

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Psalm 90]

THE ONE HUNDRED AND NINETEENTH PSALM is said by many to consist of detached sentences, and to be rather a casket of gold rings than a chain of united golden links, yet the position of this verse is somewhat remarkable, for the verse before it runs thus—"Horror has taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake Your law." Most of you know for yourselves what that sentence means, for if you hear a man swear in the streets, your blood runs chill with horror. And when you think of what has been said by blasphemers against the person of our divine Lord, and against the divine truths of revelation, you are horrified that men should have had the audacity to think—much less to say—such wicked things against the Most High. David rightly said, "Horror has taken hold upon me," and then he added our text, as if he would say, "I am horrified that they should break the law of God, and tread it under foot, for to me it is an intense delight, 'Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.' That which is their scorn is my song. What they count dross is gold to me. How can they treat such precious truths

contemptuously?” He is horrified at the thought that what is, to him, the very soul of his life, and the life of his soul, should be to them a castoff and a hate. Surely some connection is visible here; these rings are evidently linked to each other.

It is well to notice the following verse. David writes, “I have remembered Your name, O Lord, in the night, and have kept Your law”—as much as if he had said—“It is not always daylight with me; but when it is, Your statutes are my song. My sun is not always above the horizon; but when it is dark with me, and I am in trouble, I do not forget You. You are still my solace. I remember Your name, and I am comforted. If I may not see Your face, it is a joy to remember Your name, for they that know Your name will put their trust in You. If I can but remember Your name when my spirits sink, I shall have my soul stayed and upheld until the daylight shall again break in upon my spirit.” Is there not much sweetness in this hopeful assurance, much to make our text overflow with meaning?

And now I invite you to consider the text itself. It seems to me to talk about three things, three things which concern us. The first is *a pilgrim*, who is, secondly, *a singing pilgrim*. And this brings before us, thirdly, *his songbook*—“Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.”—

“Sweet strains to me Your laws have been,
Sweet music in my heart,
Where on my lonely pilgrimage I sojourn all—apart.”

I. First, here is **A PILGRIM**. David was a type of all who are true disciples of Jesus. They are all pilgrims. A pilgrim is a person who is traveling through one country to another. If we are true to our profession, we are pilgrims with an emphasis, for first, *we belong to another country*. We were not born here as to our highest nature. When we were born in the most emphatic

sense, we were born of another country altogether, “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God.” “Except a man is born again”—“from above,” says the margin—“he cannot see the kingdom of God.” We have been born from above. Our birth makes us citizens of the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. We are aliens, foreigners, strangers in this world. One said of old, “I am a stranger with you, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.” And another said, “I am a stranger in the earth.” Indeed, all the faithful confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Jesus, our leader, said, “You are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” And the beloved disciple said, “You are of God, little children, and the whole world lies in the evil one.”

We are hurrying through this world as through a foreign land. We are in this country, not as residents, but only as visitors, who take this country *en route* for glory. Ungodly men live as if they never meant to die. All their plans and preparations are evidently arranged for tarrying in this country, but if God has instructed you aright, you know assuredly that you shall die, and you have become familiar with the thought of departing from these shores. Here you have no continuing city, but are like the tent-dwelling patriarchs, who by their very abodes confessed that they looked for a possession yet to be given them. You look not only upon all other men as mortal, but upon yourselves as such, nor do you at all regret it, you would not stay here forever if you could. You know that you are emigrants to the land of the unsetting sun, and these lands are but traversed on the road to your eternal heritage. This is a rare knowledge, peculiar to the godly. You may bring an unconverted man to be conscious of his mortality, but you cannot get him to realize that he is going to another land. No, he is going, he is going, he is going where he would not. He is hurried to the land of confusion and dismay, where the shadow

of death forever rests on hopeless spirits. You do not wonder, therefore, that he tries to avoid the remembrance of this troublesome fact, and that he journeys on with his eyes shut, trying to forget that his life's voyage will ever end. To you, dear friends, your passage through this world is not a transit to somewhere or to anywhere, for you know where you are going. As Jesus said to the disciples, "Where I go you know, and the way you know," you know which way Jesus went, and you know that you will go the same way, for He has promised that where He is there you shall be also. One of His solemn declarations was, "Because I live, you shall live also," and one of His last prayers, put this promise into the form of authority and claim—"Father, I *will* that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory."

If an Italian now in England passes through France on his way to the Eternal City, he stays at Paris, or Lyons, or Marseilles on his journey, but all the while he is not a Frenchman, he is an Italian. Wherever he stays upon the road, he says to himself, "This is not Rome. This is not the place of my nativity. I have no citizen rights here, I am going onward to my own dear city, and I must hasten as best I may until I reach it." That is the condition of the Christian, his face is steadfastly set to go to the New Jerusalem, and nothing must detain him. A pilgrim in the old crusading times started out to reach Jerusalem. You know how many were attacked with that insanity in those times, I commend them not, but I use the illustration in all soberness. The Crusader journeyed on foot across Europe. Whenever he came in sight of a goodly city, whether it was Vienna, or Constantinople, he stood and gazed upon the towers, the spires, the minarets, and when he had done so, he turned to his companion and said, "A fair sight, my friend, but it is not the Holy City to which you and I are journeying." So, whenever God brings us to any place, however pleasant or delightful it

may be, it is for us to say, “A fair sight, and God be thanked for it, but it is not the Golden City yet.” Our gardens are not Paradise, our homes are not the Father’s house on high, our comforts are not our heaven, and our resting places are not the everlasting rest. We must not rest contented here below. We have not come to that promised land of which God has spoken to us in His covenant. If we were mindful of the place from which we came out, truly we have had many opportunities to return, but we are not mindful of it, our whole desire lies in the opposite direction. Our citizenship rights and civic privileges connect us with a city whose jeweled walls and shining streets are waiting for our coming. Our Captain cries to us, “Forward.” Beyond the river our possessions lie. In another land is our everlasting abode. We are, then, pilgrims born in another country, passing through this world to an inheritance beyond.

A pilgrim’s main business is to get on and pass through the land as quickly as he can. You will remember how Israel desired to pass through the land of Sihon, King of Heshbon, and Moses offered these terms—“Let me pass through your land. I will go along by the highway. I will neither turn unto the right hand nor to the left: only I will pass through on my feet.” Sihon would not allow them to pass on these conditions; neither will the world grant us a similar privilege. The tribes had to fight their way, and so must we. All we ask is a road. We may also beg the loan of six feet of earth for a sepulcher, but all else we will forego if we may the better proceed towards our inheritance. Not how to stay here in comfort, but how to pass through the land in holiness is our great question. Sometimes a home sickness is upon us, and then we are weary of this wilderness, and pine for the land which flows with milk and honey. We hear the inviting heralds and the songs of those who hold high festival in the palaces above, therefore we groan

being burdened, and long to end the days of this our banishment—

“Let me go, oh speed my journey,
Saints and seraphs lure away.
Oh, I almost feel the raptures
That belong to endless day.
Often I think I hear the singing
That is only heard above.
Let me go, oh speed my going,
Let me go where all is love!”

As pilgrims, it is true in our case that *our relatives are not, the most of them, in this country*. We have a few brethren and sisters with us who are going on pilgrimage, and we are very thankful for them, for good company cheers the way. It is pleasant when Christiana can take her dear friend Mercy with her, and when her boys Matthew and James can go, and Mr. Greatheart with them. Though, if necessary, Christian must leave Christiana and all the rest behind if they will not go with him, still it is much more pleasant to see them going on pilgrimage with us. Yet the majority of those dear to us are already over yonder. If I may not say the majority by counting heads, yet certainly in weight the great majority will be found to be in the far country. Where is our Father? Where but in heaven? And where is our Elder Brother? Is He not there too, at the right hand of God? And where is the Bridegroom of our soul, the truest and best Bridegroom with whom we are joined in a marriage union, which death cannot sever? Where, I say, is the Bridegroom of our souls? We know right well. And may not the bride desire the happy period of the home-bringing—the joyous marriage feast, the supper of the Lamb? Where our Father is, and where

Jesus is, must be our own country, and we are exiles till we reach it.

If we have a clear eye for spiritual relationships, see what a host of our nearest and dearest ones have gone across the river already, and are in the glory land. Multitudes, multitudes are there, Gad, a troop comes, a host innumerable. We are come unto “the general assembly and church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.” Let us, therefore, go on with great speed, let us not think to tarry here, for our best friends and kindred have entered into their rest, and it becomes us to follow after them.

And you know, a man who is *a pilgrim reckons that land to be his country in which he expects to remain the longest*. Through the country which he traverses he makes his way with all speed. But when he gets home he abides at his leisure, for it is the end of his toil and travail. What a little part of life shall we spend on earth! When you and I have been in heaven 10,000 years, we shall look back upon those 60 years we spent here as nothing at all, their pain as a pin's prick, their gain a speck, their duration the twinkling of an eye. Even if you have to tarry 80 or 90 years in this exile, when you have been in heaven a million years, the longest life will seem no greater than a thought, and you will wonder that you said the days were so weary and the nights so dreary, and that the years of sickness drag such a weary length along. Ah me, eternal bliss, what a drop you make of our sea of sorrow! Heaven covers up this present grief, and so much overlaps it that we could fold up myriads of such mourning and still have garments of joy enough to clothe an army of the afflicted. We make too much of this poor life, and this fondness costs us dearly. Oh for a higher estimate of the home country, with its delights forevermore! Then would the trials of a day exhale like the dew of the morning, and scarcely secure an hour of sorrow. We are only here for enough time to feel an April

shower of pain, and then we are gone among the unfading flowers of the endless May. Therefore let us not make the most of the least, and the least of the most, but let us put things in their order, and allot to this brief life its brief consideration, and to everlasting glory its weight of happy meditation. We are to dwell throughout eternity with God! Is not that our home? That is not a man's residence into which he enters at the front door and in a moment passes out at the back, and is gone never to return, as though it were a mere passage from one street to another. And yet this is about all that believers do as to this poor world. That is a man's home where he can sit down at his ease and look on all around him as his own and say—

“Here will I make a settled rest,
While others go and come,
No more a stranger or a guest,
But like a child at home.”

Yes, this shows that we are pilgrims, because we are here for so short a space compared with the length of time we shall spend in the dear country beyond.

One thing that always marks us as pilgrims is this—that *we are treated by the people of this land as strangers*. Different races of men reveal their nationality by their speech, their dress, their manners, and their habits. That which is perfectly natural in a Dutchman seems ridiculous to a Frenchman, while the customs of a Chinaman horrify a Briton. As we who are of the hill country pass through these lowlands, the people discover our foreign character, and take a wondering interest in us, sometimes of a friendly sort, but more often of a hostile kind. They marvel from where we are, and as they cannot make us out, they often come to the conclusion that we are acting a part, and are nothing better than hypocrites and pretenders. They,

of course, are honest, and all who are not like them must be false and contemptible.

This suspicion and ill will does not happen to all professors, but more or less it falls to the lot of all genuine Christians. They cannot be hid, and yet they cannot be understood, for their life is hid. Gladly would they pass *incognito* through the land, but the men of the world will not have it so. They soon discover the pilgrim strangers, and they think them very odd. I suppose they are so, if judged by the customs of the world. We do not drop into the ways and customs of the ungodly, for our Master said to us, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." Therefore, in this world, the true Christian is as strange as a Red Indian in Cheapside.

People do not understand saints, they cannot make them out, for they are constructed upon different principles from other men, and often do things which men count foolish, unmanly and absurd, for the laws which govern them are not such as the world esteems. Hence it happens that the ungodly forge a strange name for a Christian, they cannot make heads or tails of him, and so they set him up in their chamber of horrors, and fix a nickname upon him. They declare right positively, "He is mad." Blessed madness! Another time they say, "He is a hypocrite." One cries, "It is pretense," another, "It is fanaticism." Those are all expressions by which the world shows that it cannot make us out.

Are you surprised when they use such titles? You ought to be very much surprised if they do not use them. If the utterly worldly man says, "I perfectly understand you," then say to yourself, "Then I am like you, for if I had been different from you—if God's grace had given me a different way of thinking—you would have been sure to find fault with me." Oh, never be afraid of the world's censure, brethren, its praise is much more to be dreaded. When Socrates was told, "Such a

man speaks well of you today,” the philosopher was by no means gratified, but concluded that he must have done something amiss that such a fellow should speak well of him. Take censures out of a foul month to be your highest praise, but praises out of such mouths are worse than abuse. We are strangers, speckled birds, curious creatures, beings that are twice born, who have a new life which is an enigma to ungodly men. “The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound thereof, but can not tell from where it comes, or where it goes. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit.” He is an unaccountable person. “You cannot tell from where he comes from or where he goes.” He who finds redemption and eternal life in Jesus is judged to be a strange, out-of-the-way being. He who looks for his happiness in the world to come is made thereby a pilgrim, and that is to men of this world a sort of gypsy life, fictitious, romantic, absurd and unpractical. We, who are indeed such, accept our appointed condition, and the scorn which often comes with it, and from now on we break loose from bonds of time and sense to seek another country—that is, a heavenly—

“Cheerful, O Lord, at Your command
I bind my sandals on.
I take my pilgrim’s staff in hand,
And go to seek the better land,
The way Your feet have gone.”

II. But now, secondly, according to our text, the believer is **A SINGING PILGRIM**, “Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.” He does not say “my song,” only, but “my songs,” in the plural, as if he had been a great singer, given to singing, which proves that pilgrims to heaven are a merry sort of people after all. They have their trials, some trials

more than those which other men know, but then they have their joys, and among these joys are sweet delights such as worldlings can never taste. On the whole, Moses is right in his judgment of the Lord's people: "Happy are you, O Israel." "Blessed are the people," says the Psalmist, "that know the joyful sound. They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Your countenance."

Holy pilgrims are happy; theirs is not the caravan of despair, but the march of those who go from strength to strength. I hear a voice objecting, "You give a rose color to facts, for some religious people are very gloomy." I dispute not the fact. For sure some days are dark, and yet, day is not the time of darkness, even noontide may dim, and yet noon is not the hour of gloom. On earth all men must eat some bitter herbs, whether they eat the paschal lamb or not. Moreover, all are not truly godly who profess to be so. They fancied they were religious, and therefore felt themselves bound to keep up the profession, surliness and gloom are part of the buttressing by which they keep up the flimsy structure of their piety. Their religion is not real, and so they make it terrible. If your cheek is painted, you know that its ruddy hue may yield to a handkerchief or to a drop of perfume, and therefore you keep your distance and appear reserved. The countryman's rubies are not so soon dissolved. The roses of good health are not so speedily uprooted.

I have known people, who painted themselves up as Christians, and they felt it incumbent upon them to look very demure, or else their paint would have come off. They thought that they must add melancholy to their profession to imitate holiness. False notion, the gloom betrays the child of darkness. "But we do measure people's piety by the length of their faces," says one. Do you? So do I, and I like them short—the shorter the better. Those who draw very long faces do it as a matter of

pretense, and this is to be utterly condemned, for Jesus says that the Pharisees had such countenances that they might appear unto men to fast, but they were hypocrites to the core. Let me tell you for a certainty—for I have the experience of many to back me up in it—that there is a quiet, rippling brook of intense comfort in a Christian’s heart, even when he is cast down and tried, and at other times when trials are lightened, there are cascades of delight, leaping waterfalls of joy, whose silver spray is as pure as the flash of the fountains of Paradise.

I know that there are many here who, like me, understand what deep depression of spirit means, but yet we would not change our lot for all the mirth of fools or pomp of kings. Our joy no man takes from us, we are singing pilgrims, though the way is rough. Amid the ashes of our pains live the sparks of our joys, ready to flame up when the breath of the Spirit sweetly blows on them. Our latent happiness is a choicer heritage than the sinner’s riotous glee.

When suffering greatly, and scarcely able to stand, I was met by one who has long enjoyed good health and unbroken prosperity. His mind is coarse, and his tongue rasps like a file, and he is always fond of expressing his *rational* ideas as proof that he is a superior person. With sarcastic politeness he stood before me and said, “Dear, dear, what a sufferer you are! But it is what may be expected, for whom the Lord loves, He chastens.” I had barely time to admit that the chastening had been severe before he added, “You are very welcome to love which shows itself in that fashion, for my part, I had rather be without it, and enjoy the use of my limbs. I can do better without your God than with Him.” Then the hot tears scalded my eyelids and forced themselves a passage. I could bear the pain, but I could not endure to hear my God spoken evil of. I flamed up in indignation, and I cried, “If instead of having pain in my legs I had a thousand agonies in every limb of my body

I would not change places with *you*. I am content to take all that comes of God's love. God and His chastening are better than the world and its delights." Truly I know it to be so. My soul has a greater inner gladness in her deep despondency than the godless have in their high foaming merriments. Yes and even pain is tutor to praise, and teaches how to play upon all the keys of our humanity till a more complete harmony comes from us than perpetual health could have produced. Was not Herbert right when he wrote of man's double powers of grief, and then found in them double fountains of praise?—

“But as his joys are double,
So is his trouble.
He has two winters, other things but one:

Both frosts and thought do nip
And bite his lips
And he of all things fears two deaths alone.

Yet even the greatest griefs
May be reliefs,
Could he but take them right and in their ways.

Happy is he whose heart
Has found the art
To turn his double pains to double praise.”

You that are lowest down in the scale of visible joy, you that are broken in pieces like wrecks grinding upon rocks, you that are a mass of pain and poverty—you will give your Lord a good word, will you not? You will say, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.” At our worst we are better off than the world at its best. Godly poverty is better than unhallowed

riches. Our sickness is better than the worldling's health. Our abasement is better than the sinner's honors. We count it better that we suffer pain like to the torture of death than that we bathe in pleasure, when that pleasure is the effect of sin. We will take God at all the discount you can put upon Him, and you shall have the world and all the compound interest which you are able to get out of such a sham. God's people sing, they are the children of the sun, birds of the morning, and flowers of the day. Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. We hear a music which never ceases, full-toned and ascending high, and its soft cadences are with us in the night when darkness thickens upon darkness, and the heart is heavily oppressed. "Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," know you that paradox? Some of us have learned it now these many years.

It seems that the Psalmist had times of very special delight—high days and holidays, or, as the old records write, "gaudy days," days of overflowing joys. "Your statutes have been my songs." He was not always singing—at least, not at his highest pitch, but there were many brave times when he poured forth a song. If you and I cannot always sing, we do sometimes turn to that sweet amusement, and while away the time. Remember how John Bunyan represents Mr. Ready-to-Halt, Mr. Feeble-Mind, and all the rest of them? When they had cut off Giant Despair's head they danced, and Ready-to-Halt played his part upon his crutches. Yes, we have our merrymaking, brethren, at which angels find themselves at home. Pilgrims can sing and touch the lively string. When the Lord kills Giant Despair for us, we have our Psalms and *Te Deums*, and we praise the Lord upon the high-sounding cymbals. When we are brought from deep distress, our God deserves a song, and He shall have it too. The heathens tune their hymns to great Diana or to Jove, and surely the living God shall not lack for praise. Our hearts are poured out with as great delight

and merriment as when the wine vats overflow. We know nothing now of the spirit of wine, for it is evil, but the wine of the Spirit, ah, that is another thing. It fills the heart with a divine exhilaration which all the dainties of the world can never bestow.

The singing pilgrim is a man who has a world of joy within Him, and is journeying to another world, where for Him all will be joy to a still higher degree. He sings high praises unto God, and blesses His name beyond measure, for He has reason to do so, reason which never slackens or lessens. Oh that we were always as we are sometimes, then would our breath be praise. David remembered his best times. He says, "Your statutes have been my songs." He remembered that he sang, and sang often. I want some of you who are troubled tonight to rest with us awhile and remember when you were the Lord's choristers and sang as heartily as any of the company. You have hung your harps on the willows. That is a bad thing to do, but it is better to hang your harp on the willows than to break it, for it may be taken down and used again for the Lord's glory. Jesus, who has a tender heart for mourners, will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice. Think not that the past has devoured all your happiness; hope lives, peace abides, and joy is on the wing. Recall those sweet songs you loved to sing. Recall them, I say, and find in them arguments for renewed praise. If you cannot graze in the pastures of delight, and feed upon new joys, then ruminate upon the old ones, and get from them rich nutriment for praise. Think of happier days, and be happier. Listen to the echoes of yours former psalms, and begin to sing again. The thing that has been is the thing that shall be. "The Lord has been mindful of us, He will bless us."

The Psalmist bears his testimony that though now he may be mourning, yet he did once sing. I wish that Christians, whenever they feel discouraged and doubting, would not begin

telling everybody, “Oh, I am bowed down,” without also saying, “I was not always so. For years I was free as a bird, and did not envy an angel. Nor shall I always be sorrowful; I shall wear my plumes again and fill the air with my songs. I am not going to be always bowed down. I have sackcloth on my loins today, but I do remember when I was dressed in silken apparel, and rejoiced before the Lord. My sackcloth will not last long. ‘Weeping may endure for a night,’ it is the time for dews. ‘But joy comes in the morning,’ that is the time for sunlight and for bird singing, and so it will be with me.” Recollect what you used to do, dear friend, in the heyday of your faith, and tell others what you used to do that they may not think you have always been a knight of the rueful countenance. Do not let the Hill Mizar and the Hermonites be quite forgotten. When “deep calls unto deep,” say—“I will remember Your former loving kindnesses, and joys long past, and so will I put my trust in You.”

Well may every pilgrim to heaven be a singing pilgrim, because he is getting every day nearer to the land where it is all singing. There are many delights in heaven, but the main thing about heaven is the adoration of God. Oh, if I might once adore with my whole being, I would never ask to do anything else forever, but to melt away in reverent worship of the blessed God. Oh, what singing that will be when you will sing your best, your heart made perfect to sing worthily in accord with the place and theme. Oh for the music that is all harmony and no discord! What music that will be when all the dear voices which have been hushed, which we can hardly think of now without a tear, will all ring out clearly the praises of God—when all the myriad voices that have gone before will join in full chorus—when all shall be perfect, and all shall be there, and shall praise God forever. Come, Pilgrim, sing, for you are going to sing forever. Now, rehearse your blessed anthem. Sing unto the

Lord now, since you are to sing unto the Lord world without end—

“Such songs have power to quiet
The restless pulse of care
And come like the benediction
That follows after prayer.
And the night shall be filled with music
And the cares that infest the day
Shall fold their tents, like the Arabs,
And as silently steal away.”

III. Now, I must come to a close, for time admonishes me, and the last head was to be **THE SONGBOOK**, “*Your statutes* have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.”

The Bible is a wonderful book. It serves a thousand purposes in the household of God. I recollect a book my father used to have, entitled, “Family Medicine,” which was consulted when any of us fell sick with juvenile diseases. The Bible is our book of family medicine. In some houses, the book they most consult is a “Household Guide.” The Bible is the best guide for all families. This Book may be consulted in every case, and its oracle will never mislead. You can use it at funerals. There are no such words as those which Paul has written concerning the resurrection of the dead. You can use it for marriages— where else can you find such holy advice to a wedded pair? You can use it for birthdays. You can use it for a lamp at night. You can use it for a screen by day. It is a universal Book, it is the Book of books, and has furnished material for mountains of books. It is made of what I call *bibline*, or the essence of books. I am preaching to you tonight as a man without books. I cannot get at any of my books, for they are all packed away. But I have a library here in having this one volume, which is, in fact, a

number of books bound together. This one Book is enough to last a man throughout the whole of his life, however diligently he may study it. It seems that David, when he was a pilgrim, used the part which he had of this blessed Book as a songbook. It was nearly all history. What could he find to sing of there? He sang the wars and victories of the God of Israel. You and I have a bigger book than David had, can we say that, as pilgrims, we use this blessed Book for songs? Truly we ought to do so, for this is the Book that started us on pilgrimage. The blessed teachings of this Book, sent home by the Holy Spirit, made us flee from the City of Destruction, and made us seek the road that leads to eternal life. We sing about this Book, for it is “perfect, converting the soul.” It turned our feet from dangerous ways of folly, sin, and shame. By the lessons of this Book—

“Grace taught our soul to pray,
And made our eyes overflow,”

...and therefore we sing of the gracious statutes of the Lord. We use this Book for a songbook, as pilgrims, because it tells us the way to heaven. We often sing as we come to a fresh spot on the route, and bless God that we find the road to be just as we have read in the way-book, just as our divine Master said it would be. We may well sing a song of gratitude for an infallible word. We love this Book because it speaks of other pilgrims who have gone this way. It is a Book full of stories of the worthies of old, of whom it tells us—

“Once they were mourning here below,
Who wet their couch with tears,
They wrestled hard, as we do now,
With sins, and doubts, and fears.”

It is very delightful to us to read and know how they conquered, and to learn that all true pilgrims who keep to the high road will conquer too. So we sing of Gideon, and of Barak, of Jephthah, and of David, and above all, of the great Prince of pilgrims who went that way. We love this Book because it describes the life and death of the Prince of pilgrims, even our Lord Jesus. Many a sweet song we get concerning Him, as we rehearse the story of what He did and suffered for us here below, and what He is doing for us now.

This Book tells us the privileges of pilgrims, both here and hereafter, and of the care which the Lord of Pilgrims shows towards all who seek the better country.

Best of all, if better can be than what we have said already, we love this Book because it tells us of the place to which we are going. Oh, how it paints that city, not in many words, but in suggestive similes. How wonderfully it talks to us of our abode! Why, if it said no more than that “they shall be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory,” we would know enough of heaven to make our hearts dance for joy. To be with Jesus where He is, to behold His glory, this is bliss pressed down and running over, more than our hearts can hold. Have you ever seen the heavenly country? Have your eyes ever been permitted to rest upon it? “No,” says one, “certainly not. ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard.’” A very nice text, brother; go on with it; go on with it. You may make God say what He does not mean if you quote half a text. He says, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him; but God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit.” Hence we know these joys by revelation, and that is the best of knowledge. The eye has not seen, but we have done with seeing with eyes when we deal with spiritual things. Our ears have not heard, these are poor deaf things. At best they only hear mortal

sounds, but we have an inward function, faculty, power of hearing without ears. God does not speak in audible tones to his children, and yet He speaks to them, and they hear Him. We have a spirit which dispenses with fleshly faculties when it comes to dealing with God. He has revealed to us somewhat of the joy of communion with Christ, somewhat of the joy of conquered sin, somewhat of the joy of beholding His face, and praising and blessing His name. We know already somewhat of the joy of being made like Him, and one with Him, and all this sets our feet on the top of Mount Clear, and puts the telescope to our eyes. And if our hand is steady, as, thank God, sometimes it is, we see the city, and we long to enter it! “Your statutes have been my song in the house of my pilgrimage,” because there I read of what is to be my home when pilgrim days are over, and I shall see the Master face to face.

Now, dear hearers, do you sing out of this holy Book? A country may be judged by its songs, and so may an individual. Do you sing the Song of Songs? Are God’s statutes, royal music for you? A wise man once said that he would permit anybody to make the laws of a country if he had the making of the ballads, for these kindle the spirit and fashion the character. What do you sing, brothers and sisters? What do you sing? I leave that question as a heart-searching one—what do you sing? Or are you one that never sings at all? Poor soul, how do you live here, and where will you live hereafter? Where must non-singers go? God give you a singing heart, and may you sing unto the Well-beloved a song touching the Well-beloved, and keep on singing it “till the day break and the shadows flee away.” God bless you. Amen.

1653 THE RESURRECTION – 2 TIM. 2:8

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, April 9, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel. — 2 Timothy 2:8

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Luke 24]

FROM LONG SICKNESS my mind is scarcely equal to the work before me. Certainly, if I had ever sought after brilliance of thought or language, I should have failed today, for I am almost at the lowest stage of incapacity. I have only been comforted in the thought of preaching to you this morning by the reflection that it is the doctrine itself which God blesses, and not the way in which it may be spoken, for if God had made the power to depend upon the speaker and his style, He would have chosen that the resurrection, grandest of all truths, would have been proclaimed by angels rather than by men. Yet He set aside the seraph for the humbler creature. After angels had spoken a word or two to the women their testimony ceased. The most prominent testimony to the resurrection of the Lord was at first that of holy women, and afterwards that of each one of the guileless men and women who made up the 500 or more whose privilege it was to have actually seen the risen Savior, and who therefore could bear witness to what they had seen, though they may have been quite unable to describe with

eloquence what they had beheld. Upon our Lord's rising I have nothing to say, and God's ministers have nothing to say, beyond bearing witness to the fact that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead. Put it in poetry; tell it out in sublime Miltonic verse, it will come to no more. Tell it out in monosyllables, and write it so that little children may read it in their first spelling books, and it will come to nothing less. "The Lord is risen indeed" is the sum and substance of our witness when we speak of our risen Redeemer. If we do but know the truth of this resurrection, and feel the power of it, our mode of utterance is of secondary consequence, for the Holy Spirit will bear witness to the truth, and cause it to produce fruit in the minds of our hearers.

Our present text is found in Paul's second letter to Timothy. The venerable minister is anxious about the young man who has preached with remarkable success, and whom he regards in some respects as his successor. The old man is about to put off his tabernacle, and he is concerned that his son in the gospel, should preach the same truth as his father has preached, and should by no means adulterate the gospel. A tendency showed itself in Timothy's day, and the same tendency exists at this very hour, to try to get away from the simple matters of fact, upon which our religion is built, to something more philosophical and hard to be understood. The word which the common people heard gladly is not fine enough for cultured sages, and so they must surround it with a mist of human thought and speculation. Three or four plain facts constitute the gospel, even as Paul puts it in the fifteenth chapter of his first Epistle to the Corinthians, "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." Upon the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection

of Jesus our salvation hinges. He who believes these truths aright has believed the gospel, and believing the gospel he shall without doubt find eternal salvation therein.

But men want novelties. They cannot endure that the trumpet should give forth the same certain sound, they crave some fresh fantasia every day. *“The gospel with variations.”* is the music for them. Intellect is progressive, they say; they must, therefore, march ahead of their forefathers. Incarnate Deity, a holy life, an atoning death, and a literal resurrection—having heard these things now for nearly nineteen centuries, they are just a little stale, and the cultivated mind hungers for a change from the old-fashioned manna.

Even in Paul's day this tendency was manifest, and so they sought to regard facts as mysteries or parables, and they labored to find a spiritual meaning in them till they went so far as to deny them as actual facts. Seeking a profound meaning, they overlooked the fact itself, losing the substance in a foolish preference for the shadow. While God set before them glorious events which fill heaven with amazement, they showed their foolish wisdom by accepting the plain historical facts as myths to be interpreted or riddles to be solved. He who believed as a little child was pushed aside as a fool, that the disputer and the scribe might come in to mystify simplicity, and hide the light of truth. Hence there had arisen a certain Hymenaeus and Philetus, “Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is already past; and overthrow the faith of some.”

Turn to verse seventeen and read for yourselves. They spirited away the resurrection, they made it to mean something very deep and mystical, and in the process they took away the actual resurrection altogether. Among men there is still a craving after new meanings, refinements upon old doctrines, and spiritualization of literal facts. They tear out the heart of the truth, and give us the carcass stuffed with hypotheses,

speculations, and larger hopes. The golden shields of Solomon are taken away, and shields of brass are hung up in their place, will they not answer every purpose, and is not the metal more in favor with the age? It may be so, but we never admired Rehoboam, and we are old-fashioned enough to prefer the original shields of gold. The apostle Paul was very anxious that Timothy should stand firm to the old witness, and should understand in their plain meaning, his testimonies to the fact that Jesus Christ of the seed of David rose again from the dead.

Within the compass of this verse several facts are recorded, and first, there is here the great truth that Jesus, the Son of the Highest, was anointed of God. The apostle calls Him “Jesus *Christ*,” that is, the anointed one, the Messiah, the sent of God. He calls Him, also “*Jesus*,” which signifies a Savior, and it is a grand truth that He who was born of Mary, He who was laid in the manger at Bethlehem, He who loved and lived and died for us, is the ordained and anointed Savior of men. We have not a moment’s doubt about the mission, office, and design of our Lord Jesus. In fact, we hang our soul’s salvation upon His being anointed of the Lord to be the Savior of men.

This Jesus Christ was really and truly man, for Paul says He was “*of the seed of David*.” True He was divine, and His birth was not after the ordinary manner of men, but still He was in all respects partaker of our human nature, and came of the stock of David. This also we do believe. We are not among those who spiritualize the incarnation, and suppose that God was here as a phantom, or that the whole story is but an instructive legend. No, in very flesh and blood did the Son of God abide among men, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh in the days of His sojourn here below. We know and believe that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. We love the incarnate God, and in Him we fix our trust.

It is implied, too, in the text, that *Jesus died*, for He could not be raised from the dead if He had not first gone down among the dead, and been one of them. Yes, Jesus died, the crucifixion was no delusion, and the piercing of His side with a spear was most clear and evident proof that He was dead, His heart was pierced, and the blood and water flowed from them. As a dead man, He was taken down from the cross and carried by gentle hands, and laid in Joseph's virgin tomb. I think I see that pale corpse, white as a lily. Mark how it is stained with the blood of His five wounds, which make Him red as the rose. See how the holy women tenderly wrap Him in fine linen with sweet spices, and leave Him to spend His Sabbath all alone in the rock-hewn sepulcher. No man in this world was ever more surely dead than He. "He made His grave with the wicked and with the rich in His death." As dead they laid Him in the place of the dead, with napkin and grave clothes, and trappings fit for a grave. Then they rolled the great stone at the grave's mouth and left Him, knowing that He was dead.

Then comes the grand truth that as soon as ever the third sun commenced his shining circuit, *Jesus rose again*. His body had not decayed, for it was not possible for that Holy Thing to see corruption. But still, it had been, dead and by the power of God—by His own power, by the Father's power, by the power of the Spirit—for it is attributed to each of these in turn, before the sun had risen, His dead body was quickened. The silent heart began to beat again, and through the stagnant canals of the veins, the lifeblood began to circulate. The soul of the Redeemer again took possession of the body, and it lived once more. There He was within the sepulcher, as truly living as to all parts of Him as He had ever been. He literally and truly, in a material body, came forth from the tomb to live among men till the hour of His ascension into heaven. This is the truth which is still to be taught, refine it who may, spiritualize it who

dare. This is the historical fact which the apostles witnessed, this is the truth for which the confessors bled and died. This is the doctrine which is the keystone of the arch of Christianity, and they that hold it not have cast aside the essential truth of God. How can they hope for salvation for their souls if they do not believe that “the Lord is risen indeed”?

This morning I wish to do three things. First, let us *consider the bearings of the resurrection of Christ upon other great truths*. Secondly, let us consider *the bearings of this fact upon the gospel*, for it has such bearings, according to the text—“Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel.” Thirdly, let us *consider its bearings on ourselves*, which are all indicated in the word “Remember.”

I. First, then, beloved, as God shall help us, let us **CONSIDER THE BEARINGS OF THE FACT THAT JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD.**

It is clear at the outset that *the resurrection of our Lord was a tangible proof that there is another life*. Have you not quoted a great many times certain lines about “That undiscovered country from whose journey no traveler returns”? It is not so. There was once a traveler who said, “I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go away I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am there you may be also.” He said, “A little time and you shall see Me, and again a little time and you shall not see Me because I go to the Father.” Do you not remember these words of His? Our divine Lord went to the undiscovered country and He returned. He said that at the third day He would be back again, and He was true to His word. There is no doubt that there is another state for human life, for Jesus has been in it, and has come back from it. We have no doubt as to a future existence, for Jesus existed after death. We have no doubt as to a paradise of future bliss, for Jesus went to it and returned. Though He has left us again, yet that coming back to

tarry with us 40 days has given us a sure pledge that He will return a second time, when the hour is due, and then will be with us for a thousand years, and reign gloriously on earth amongst His ancients. His return from among the dead is a pledge to us of existence after death, and we rejoice in it.

His resurrection is also a pledge that the body will surely live again, and rise to a superior condition, for the body of our blessed Master was no phantom after death any more than before. "Handle Me, and see." Oh wondrous proof! He said, "Handle Me, and see," and then to Thomas, "Reach here your finger, and behold My hands; and reach here your hand, and thrust it into My side." What deception is possible here? The risen Jesus was no mere spirit. He promptly cried, "A spirit has not flesh and bones, as you see I have." "Bring Me," He said, "something to eat." And as if to show how real His body was, though He did not need to eat, yet He did eat, and a piece of a broiled fish and honeycomb were proofs of the reality of the act. Now, the body of our Lord in its risen state did not exhibit the whole of His glorification, for otherwise we should have seen John falling at His feet as dead. And we should have seen all His disciples overcome with the glory of the vision.

But, still, in a great measure, we may call the 40 days' sojourn—"The life of Jesus in His glory upon earth." He was no longer despised and rejected of men, but a glory surrounded Him. It is evident that the raised body passed from place to place in a single moment; that it appeared and vanished at will, and was superior to the laws of matter. The risen body was incapable of pain, of hunger, thirst, and weariness during the time in which it remained here below—fit representative of the bulk of which it was the first fruits. Of our body also it shall be said before long, "It was sown in weakness, it is raised in power: it was sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory." Let us then, as we think of the risen Christ, rest quite sure of a future

life, and quite sure that our body will exist in it in a glorified condition.

I do not know whether you are ever troubled with doubts in connection with the world to come, as to whether it can be true that we shall live eternally. Here is the point which makes death so terrible to doubters, for while they have realized the grave, they have not realized the life beyond it. Now, the best help to that realization is a firm grip of the fact that Jesus died and Jesus rose again. This fact is proved better than any other event in history. The witness to it is far stronger than to anything else that is written either in profane or sacred records. The rising of our Lord Jesus Christ being certain, you may rest assured of the existence of another world. That is the first bearing of this great truth.

Secondly, *Christ's rising from the dead was the seal to all His claims.* It was true, then, that He was sent of God, for God raised Him from the dead in confirmation of His mission. He had said Himself, "Destroy this body, and in three days I will raise it up." Look, there He is, the temple of His body is rebuilt! He had even given this as a sign that as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so should the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, and should then come forth to life again. Behold His own appointed sign fulfilled! Before men's eye the seal is manifest! Suppose He had never risen. You and I might have believed in the truth of a certain mission which God had given Him, but we could never have believed in the truth of such a commission as He claimed to have received—a commission to be our Redeemer from death and hell. How could He be our ransom from the grave if He had Himself remained under the dominion of death?

Dear friends, the rising of Christ from the dead proved that this man was innocent of every sin. He could not be held by

the bands of death, for there was no sin to make those bands fast. Corruption could not touch His pure body, for no original sin had defiled the Holy One. Death could not keep Him a continual prisoner, because He had not actually come under sin, and though He took sin of ours, and bore it by imputation, and therefore died, yet He had no fault of His own, and must, therefore, be set free when His imputed load had been removed.

Moreover, Christ's rising from the dead proved His claim to Deity. We are told in another place that He was proved to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. He raised Himself by His own power, and though the Father and the Holy Spirit were cooperative with Him, and therefore His resurrection is ascribed to them, yet it was because the Father had given Him to have life in Himself that therefore He arose from the dead. Oh, risen Savior, Your rising is the seal of Your work! We can have no doubt about You now that You have left the tomb. Prophet of Nazareth, You are indeed the Christ of God, for God has loosed the bands of death for You! Son of David, You are indeed the elect and precious One, for You live forever! Your resurrection life has set the sign-manual of heaven to all that You have said and done, and for this we bless and magnify Your name.

A third bearing of His resurrection is this, and it is a very grand one—*the resurrection of our Lord, according to Scripture, was the acceptance of His sacrifice*. By the Lord Jesus Christ rising from the dead evidence was given that He had fully endured the penalty which was due to human guilt. "The soul that sins, it shall die"—that is the determination of the God of heaven. Jesus stands in the sinner's place and dies, and when He has done *that* nothing more can be demanded of Him, for he that is dead is free from the law. You take a man who has been guilty of a capital offense. He is condemned to be hanged. He is hanged by the neck till he is dead—what more has the law to do with

him? It has done with him, for it has executed its sentence upon him. If he can be brought back to life again, he is clear from the law. No writ that runs in Her Majesty's dominions can touch him—he has suffered the penalty. So when our Lord Jesus rose from the dead, after having died, He had fully paid the penalty that was due to justice for the sin of His people, and His new life was a life clear of penalty, free from liability.

You and I are clear from the claims of the law because Jesus stood in our place and God will not exact payment both from us and from our Substitute. It is contrary to justice to sue both the Surety and those for whom He stood. And now, joy upon joy! The burden of liability which once did lie upon the Substitute is removed from Him also, seeing He has by the suffering of death, vindicated justice and made satisfaction to the injured law. Now both the sinner and the Surety are free. This is a great joy, a joy for which to make the golden harps ring out a loftier style of music. He who took our debt has now delivered Himself from it by dying on the cross. His new life, now that He has risen from the dead, is a life free from legal claim, and it is the token to us that we whom He represented are also free. Listen! "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies, who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yes, rather, that is risen again." It is a knockdown blow to fear when the apostle says that we cannot be condemned because Christ has died in our place, but he puts a double force into it when he cries, "Yes, rather, that is risen again." If Satan, therefore, shall come to any believer and say, "What about your sin," tell him Jesus died for it and your sin is put away. If he come a second time and says to you, "What about your sin?" Answer him, "Jesus lives, and His life is the assurance of our justification; for if our Surety had not paid the debt, He would still be under the power of death." Inasmuch as Jesus has discharged all our liabilities, and left not one

farthing due to God's justice from one of His people, He lives and is clear, and we live in Him, and are clear also by virtue of our union with Him. Is not this a glorious doctrine, this doctrine of the resurrection, in its bearing upon the justification of the saints? The Lord Jesus gave Himself for our sins, but He rose again for our justification.

Bear with me while I notice, next, another bearing of this resurrection of Christ. *It was a guarantee of His people's resurrection.* There is a great truth that never is to be forgotten, namely, that Christ and His people are one just as Adam and all his seed are one. That which Adam did, as a head for a body, and as our Lord Jesus and all believers are one, so, that which Jesus did, He did as a head for a body. We were crucified together with Christ, we were buried with Christ, and we are risen together with Him. Yes, He has raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. He says, "Because I live, you shall live also." If Christ is not raised from the dead your faith is in vain, and our preaching is in vain, and you are yet in your sins, and those that have fallen asleep in Christ have perished, and you will perish too. But if Christ has been raised from the dead, then all His people must be raised also, it is a matter of gospel necessity. There is no logic more imperative than the argument drawn from union with Christ. God has made the saints one with Christ, and if Christ has risen, all the saints must rise too. My soul takes firm hold on this and as she strengthens her grasp, she loses all fear of death. Now we bear our dear ones to the cemetery and leave them each one in his narrow cell, calmly bidding them farewell and saying—

"So Jesus slept—God's dying Son
Passed through the grave and blest the bed;
Rest here, dear saint, till from His throne
The morning breaks and pierces the shade."

It is not merely ours to know that our brethren are living in heaven, but also that their mortal parts are in divine custody, securely kept till the appointed hour when the body shall be reanimated, and the perfect man shall enjoy the adoption of God. We are sure that our dead men shall live, together with Christ's dead body they shall rise. No power can hold in durance the redeemed of the Lord. "Let My people go" shall be a command as much obeyed by death as once by the humbled Pharaoh who could not hold a single Israelite in bonds. The day of deliverance comes quickly—

"Break from His throne, illustrious morn!
Attend, O earth, His sovereign word;
Restore your trust, a glorious form
He must ascend to meet His Lord."

Once more, *our Lord's rising from the dead is a fair picture of the new life which all believers already enjoy*. Beloved, though this body is still subject to bondage like the rest of the visible creation, according to the law stated in Scripture, "the body is dead because of sin," yet "the spirit is life because of righteousness." The regeneration which has taken place in those who believe has changed our spirit, and given to it eternal life, but it has not affected our body further than this, that it has made it to be the temple of the Holy Spirit, and thus it is a holy thing, and cannot be obnoxious to the Lord, or swept away among unholy things. But still the body is subject to pain and weariness, and to the supreme sentence of death. Not so the spirit. There is already within us a part of the resurrection accomplished, since it is written, "And you has He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." You once were like the ungodly, under the law of sin and death, but you have been brought out of the

bondage of corruption into the liberty of life and grace, the Lord having worked in you gloriously, “according to the working of His mighty power, which He worked in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places.”

Now, just as Jesus Christ led, after His resurrection, a life very different from that before His death, so you and I are called upon to live a high and noble spiritual and heavenly life, seeing that we have been raised from the dead to die no more. Let us joy and rejoice in this. Let us behave as those who are alive from the dead, the happy children of the resurrection. Do not let us be money-grubbers, or hunters after worldly fame. Let us not set our affections on the foul things of this dead and rotten world, but let our hearts fly upward, like young birds that have broken loose of their shells—upward towards our Lord and the heavenly things upon which He would have us set our minds. Living truth, living work, living faith, these are the things for living men, let us cast off the grave clothes of our former lusts, and wear the garments of light and life. May the Spirit of God help us in further meditating upon these things at home.

II. Now, secondly, **LET US CONSIDER THE BEARINGS OF THIS FACT OF THE RESURRECTION UPON THE GOSPEL**, for Paul says, “Jesus Christ was raised from the dead *according to my gospel*.” I always like to see what way any kind of statement bears on the gospel. I may not have many more opportunities of preaching, and I have made up my mind to this one thing, that I will waste no time upon secondary themes, but when I do preach, it shall be the gospel, or something very closely bearing upon it. I will endeavor each time I preach to strike under the fifth rib, and never beat the air. Those who have a taste for the superfluities may take their fill of them; it is for me to keep to the great necessary truths by which men’s souls are

saved. My work is to preach Christ crucified and the gospel, which gives men salvation through faith. I hear every now and then of very taking sermons about some bright new nothing or another. Some preachers remind me of the emperor who had a wonderful skill in carving men's heads upon cherry stones. What a multitude of preachers we have that can make wonderfully fine discourses out of a mere passing thought, of no consequence to anyone. But we want the gospel. We have to live and die, and we must have the gospel. Certain of us may be cold in our graves before many weeks are over, and we cannot afford to toy and trifle, we need to see the bearings of all teachings upon our eternal destinies, and upon the gospel which sheds its light over our future.

The resurrection of Christ is vital, because first it tells us that *the gospel is the gospel of a living Savior*. We have not to send poor penitents to the crucifix, the dead image of a dead man. We say not, "These are your gods, O Israel!" We have not to send you to a little baby Christ nursed by a woman, nothing of the sort. Behold the Lord that lives and was dead and is alive forevermore, and has the keys of hell and of death! Behold in Him a living and accessible Savior who out of glory still cries with loving accents, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them." I say we have a living Savior, and is not this a glorious feature of the gospel?

Notice next, that *we have a powerful Savior* in connection with the gospel that we preach, for He who had power to raise Himself from the dead, has all power now that He is raised. He, who in death vanquishes death, can much more conquer by His life. He, who being in the grave did, nevertheless, burst all its bonds, can assuredly deliver all His people. He who, coming under the power of the law did, nevertheless, fulfill the law, and

thus set His people free from bondage, must be mighty to save. You need a Savior strong and mighty, yet you do not need one stronger than He of whom it is written that He rose again from the dead. What a blessed gospel we have to preach—the gospel of a living Christ who has returned from the dead leading captivity captive.

And now notice that we have *the gospel of complete justification* to preach to you. We do not come and say, “Brethren, Jesus Christ by His death did something by which men may be saved if they have a mind to be, and diligently carry out their good resolves.” No, no, we say Jesus Christ took the sin of His people upon Himself and bore the consequences of them in His own body on the cross, so that He died, and having died and paid the penalty, He lives again. And now all for whom He died, all His people whose sins He bore are free from the guilt of sin. You ask me, “Who are they?” and I reply, as many as believe on Him. Whoever believes in Jesus Christ is as free from the guilt of sin as Christ is. Our Lord Jesus took the sins of His people, and died in the sinner’s place, and now being Himself, set free, all His people are set free in their Representative. This doctrine is worth preaching. One may well rise from his bed to talk about perfect justification through faith in Christ Jesus. One might as well stay asleep as rise to say that Jesus accomplished little or nothing by His passion and His rising. Some seem to dream that Jesus made some little opening by which we have a slight chance of reaching pardon and eternal life if we are diligent for many years. This is not our gospel. Jesus has saved His people. He has performed the work entrusted to Him. He has finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness, and whoever believes in Him is not condemned, and never can be.

Once again, the connection of the resurrection and the gospel is this, *it proves the safety of the saints*, for if when Christ

rose His people rose also, they rose to a life like that of their Lord, and therefore they can never die. It is written, “Christ being raised from the dead dies no more; death has no more dominion over Him,” and it is so with the believer. If you have been dead with Christ and are risen with Christ, death has no more dominion over you. You shall never go back to the beggarly elements of sin; you shall never become what you were before your regeneration. You shall never perish; neither shall any pluck you out of Jesus’ hands. He has put within you a living and incorruptible seed which lives and abides forever. He says Himself, “The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of living water springing up unto everlasting life.” Wherefore hold fast to this, and let the resurrection of your Lord be the pledge of your own final perseverance.

Brethren, I cannot stop to show you how this resurrection touches the gospel at every point, but Paul is always full of it. More than 30 times Paul talks about the resurrection, and occasionally at great length, giving whole chapters to the glorious theme. The more I think of it, the more I delight to preach Jesus and the resurrection. The glad tidings that Christ has risen is as truly the gospel as the doctrine that He came among men and for men presented His blood as a ransom. If angels sang glory to God in the highest when the Lord was born, I feel impelled to repeat the note now that He is risen from the dead.

III. And so I come to my last head, and to the practical conclusion, **THE BEARING OF THIS RESURRECTION UPON OURSELVES**. Paul expressly bids us “Remember” it. “Why?” asks one, “we don’t forget it.” Are you sure you don’t? I find myself far too forgetful of divine truths. We ought not to forget, for this first day of the week is consecrated for Sabbatical purposes to compel us to think of the resurrection. On the seventh day men celebrated a finished creation, on the first day

we celebrate a finished redemption. Bear it, then, in mind. Now, if you will remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David rose from the dead, what will follow?

First, you will find that *most of your trials will vanish*. Are you tried by your sin? Jesus Christ rose again from the dead for your justification. Does Satan accuse? Jesus rose to be your advocate and intercessor. Do infirmities hinder? The living Christ will show Himself strong on your behalf. You have a living Christ, and in Him you have all things. Do you dread death? Jesus, in rising again, has vanquished the last enemy. He will come and meet you when it is your turn to pass through the chilly stream, and you shall ford it in sweet company. What is your trouble? I care not what it is, for if you will only think of Jesus as living, full of power, full of love, and full of sympathy, having experienced all your trials, even unto death, you will have such a confidence in His tender care and in His boundless ability that you will follow in His footsteps without a question. Remember Jesus, and that He rose again from the dead, and your confidence will rise as on eagles' wings.

Next remember Jesus, for then you will see how your present sufferings are as nothing compared with His sufferings, and you will learn to *expect victory over your sufferings even as He obtained victory*. Kindly look at the chapter, and you will find the apostle saying in the third verse, "You therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ," and further on in the 11th verse, "It is a faithful saying: For if we are dead in Him, we shall also live in Him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him." Now, then, when you are called to suffer, think—"Jesus suffered, yet Jesus rose again from the dead. He came up out of His baptism of griefs the better and more glorious for it and so shall I!" Therefore go into the furnace at the Lord's bidding, and do not fear that the smell of fire shall pass upon you. Go down into the grave and do not think that the worm shall make

an end of you any more than it did of Him. Behold, in the risen One, the type and model of what you are and are to be! Wherefore fear not, for He conquered! Stand not trembling, but march boldly on, for Jesus Christ of the seed of David rose from the dead, and you who are of the seed of the promise shall rise again from all your trials and afflictions, and live a glorious life.

We see here, dear brethren, in being told to remember Jesus, that *there is hope even in our hopelessness*. When are things most hopeless in a man? Why, when he is dead. Do you know what it is to come down to that, so far as your inward weakness is concerned? I do. At times it seems to me that all my joy is buried like a dead thing, and all my present usefulness and all my hope of being useful in the future are in a coffin and lay underground like a corpse. In the anguish of my spirit, and the desolation of my heart, I could count it better to die than to live. You say it should not be so. I grant you it should not be so, but so it is.

Many things happen within the minds of poor mortals which should not happen. If we had more courage and more faith they would not happen. Yes, but when we go down, down, down, is it not a blessed thing that Jesus Christ of the seed of David died, and was raised from the dead? If I sink right down among the dead men yet will I hold to this blessed hope, that as Jesus rose again from the dead, so also shall my joy, my usefulness, my hope, my spirit rise. “You, which have showed us great and sore troubles shall quicken us again, and bring us up from the lowest depths of the earth.” This casting down and slaying is good for us. We take a deal of killing, and it is by being killed that we live. Many a man will never live till his proud self is slain.

O proud Pharisee, if you are to live among those whom God accepts, you will have to come to the slaughterhouse and

be cut in pieces as well as killed. “This is dreadful work,” says one, “this dividing of joints and marrow, this spiritual dismemberment and destruction.” Assuredly it is painful, and yet it is a grievous loss to be denied it. Alas, how many are so good and excellent, and strong and wise, and clever, and all that, that they cannot agree to be saved by grace through faith. If they could be reduced to less than nothing, it would be the finest thing that ever happened to them.

Remember what Solomon said might be done with the fool, and yet it would not answer—he was to be ground in a mortar among wheat with a pestle—pretty hard dealing that, and yet his folly would not depart from him. Not by that process alone, but through some such method, the Holy Spirit brings men away from their folly. Under His killing operations this may be their comfort that, if Jesus Christ rose literally from the dead (not from sickness, but from death), and lives again, even so will His people. Did you ever get, where Bunyan pictures Christian as getting, right under the old dragon’s foot? He is very heavy, and presses the very breath out of a fellow when he makes him his footstool. Poor Christian lay there with the dragon’s foot on his chest, but he was just able to stretch out his hand and lay hold on his sword, which, by a good providence, lay within his reach. Then he gave Apollyon a deadly thrust, which made him spread his dragon wings and fly away. The poor crushed and broken pilgrim, as he gave the stab to his foe, cried, “Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; though I fall, yet shall I rise again!” Brothers and sisters, do the same. You that are near despair, let this be the strength that nerves your arm and steels your heart. “Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to Paul’s gospel.”

Lastly, this proves *the futility of all opposition to Christ*. The learned are going to destroy the Christian religion. Already, according to their boastings, it has pretty nearly come to an end.

The pulpit is powerless, it cannot command public attention. We stand up and preach to empty benches! As you see— *or do not see*, nothing remains for us but to die decently, so they insinuate. And what then? When our Lord was dead, when the clay-cold corpse lay watched by the Roman soldiers, and with a seal upon the enclosing stone, was not the cause in mortal jeopardy? But how fared it? Did it die out? Every disciple that Jesus had made forsook Him and fled, was not Christianity then destroyed? No, that very day our Lord won a victory which shook the gates of hell, and caused the universe to stand astonished. Matters are not worse with Him at this hour! His affairs are not in a sadder condition today than then. No, see Him today and judge. On His head are many crowns, and at His feet the hosts of angels bow! Jesus is the master of legions today, while the Caesars have passed away! Here are His people—needy, obscure, despised, I grant you, still, but assuredly somewhat more numerous than they were when they laid Him in the tomb. His cause is not to be crushed, it is forever rising.

Year after year, century after century, bands of true and honest hearts are marching up to the assault of the citadel of Satan. The prince of this world has a stronghold here on earth, and we are to capture it. But as yet we see small progress, for rank after rank the warriors of the Lord have marched to the breach and disappeared beneath the terrible fire of death. All who have gone before seem to have been utterly cut off and destroyed, and still the enemy holds his ramparts against us. Do you think nothing has been done? Has death taken away those martyrs, and confessors, and preachers, and laborious saints, and has nothing been achieved? Truly if Christ were dead, I would admit our defeat, for they that are fallen asleep in Him would have perished. But as the Christ lives, so the cause lives, and they that have fallen are not dead, they have vanished from

our sight for a little while, but if the curtain could be withdrawn, every one of them would be seen to stand in his lot unharmed, crowned and victorious! “Who are these arrayed in white robes, and whence came they?” These are they that were defeated! Why, then, their crowns? These are they that were dishonored! Why, then, their white robes? These are they who clung to a cause which is overthrown. Why, then, their long line of victories, for there is not a vanquished man among them all? Let the truth be spoken. Defeat is not the word for the cause of Jesus, the Prince of the house of David. We have always been victorious, brethren, we are victorious now. Follow your Master on your white horses and be not afraid! I see Him in the front with His blood-stained vesture around Him, fresh from the winepress where He has trod down His foes. You have not to present atoning blood, but only to conquer after your Lord. Put on your white raiment and follow Him on your white horses, conquering and to conquer. He is nearer than we think, and the end of all things may be before the next jibe shall have come forth from the mouth of the last new skeptic. Have confidence in the risen One, and live in the power of His resurrection.

1654 “AT YOUR WORD” – LUKE 5:5

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, April 16, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

And Simon answering said unto Him, “Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.” — Luke 5:5

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Luke 1:1-26]

HOW VERY MUCH may simple obedience partake of the sublime! Peter went to take up the net, and let it down into the sea, and he said as naturally as possible, “At Your word I will let down the net.” But he was then and there appealing to one of the grandest principles which rules among intelligent beings and to the strongest force which sways the universe—“At Your word.” Great God, it is “at Your Word” that seraphs fly and cherubs bow! Your angels which excel in strength do Your commandments hearkening to the voice of Your word. “At Your word” space and time first came into existence, and all things that are. “At Your word”—here is the cause of causes, the beginning of the creation of God. “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made,” and by that word was the present constitution of this round world settled as it stands. When the earth was formless and dark, Your voice, O Lord, was heard, saying, “Let there be light,” and “at Your word” light leaped forth. “At Your word” day and night took up their places, and

“at Your word” the waters were divided from the waters by the firmament of heaven. “At Your word” the dry land appeared, and the seas retired to their channels. “At Your word” the globe was mantled over with green, and vegetable life began. “At Your word” appeared the sun and moon and stars, “for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years.” “At Your word” the living creatures filled the sea, and air, and land, and man, at last, appeared. Of all this we are well assured, for by faith we know that the worlds were framed by the word of God. Acting in conformity with the word of our Lord we feel ourselves to be in order with all the forces of the universe, traveling on the main track of all real existence. Is not this a sublime condition, even though it is seen in the common deeds of our everyday life?

It is not in creation alone that the word of the Lord is supreme, but in providence too its majestic power is manifested, for the Lord upholds all things by the word of His power. Snow and vapor and stormy wind are all fulfilling His word. His word runs very swiftly. When frost binds up the life-floods of the year, the Lord sends forth His word and melts them. Nature abides and moves by the word of the Lord. So, too, all matters of fact and history are beneath the supreme word. Jehovah stands the center of all things, as Lord of all He abides at the saluting point, and all the events of the ages come marching by at His word, bowing to His sovereign will. “At Your word,” O God, kingdoms arise and empires flourish. “At Your word” races of men become dominant, and tread down their fellows. “At Your word” dynasties die, kingdoms crumble, mighty cities become a wilderness, and armies of men melt away like the hoarfrost of the morning. Despite the sin of man and the rage of devils, there is a sublime sense in which all things from the beginning, since Adam crossed the threshold of Eden even until now, have happened according to the purpose and will of

the Lord of Hosts. Prophecy utters her oracles, and history writes her pages, "at Your word," O Lord.

It is wonderful to think of the fisherman of Galilee letting down his net in perfect consonance with all the arrangements of the ages. His net obeys the law which regulates the spheres. His hand consciously does what Arcturus and Orion are doing without thought. This little bell on the Galilean lake rings out in harmony with the everlasting chimes. "At Your word," says Peter, as he promptly obeys, therein repeating the watchword of seas and stars, of winds and worlds. It is glorious to be keeping step with the marching of the armies of the King of kings.

There is another way of working out this thought. "At Your word" has been the password of all good men from the beginning until now. Saints have acted upon these three words and found their marching orders in them. An ark is built on dry land, and the vulgar crowd gathers about the hoary patriarch, laughing at him, but he is not ashamed, for lifting his face to heaven, he says, "I have built this great vessel, O Jehovah, at Your word." Abraham quits the place of his childhood, leaves his family, and goes with Sarah to a land of which he knows nothing. Crossing the broad Euphrates, and entering upon a country possessed by the Canaanite, in which he roams as a stranger and a sojourner all his days. He dwells in tents with Isaac and Jacob. If any scoff at him for thus renouncing the comforts of settled life, he lifts his calm face to heaven and smilingly answers to the Lord, "It is at Your word." Yes, and even when his brow is furrowed, and the hot tears are ready to force themselves from beneath the patriarch's eyelids as he lifts his hand with the knife to stab Isaac in the heart, if any charge him with murder, or think him mad, he lifts the same placid face towards the majesty of the Most High and says, "It is at Your word." At that word he joyfully sheathes the sacrificial

knife, for he has proven his willingness to go to the utmost at the word of the Lord, His God.

If I were to introduce you to a thousand of the faithful ones who have shown the obedience of faith, in every case they would justify their acts by telling you that they did them “at God’s word.” Moses lifts his rod in the presence of the haughty Pharaoh, “at Your word,” great God! Nor does he lift that rod in vain at Jehovah’s word, for thick and heavy fall the plagues upon the children of Ham. They are made to know that God’s word returns not to Him void, but fulfills His purpose, whether it is of threat or of promise. See Moses lead the people out of Egypt, the whole host in its myriads! Mark how he has brought them to the Red Sea, where the wilderness does shut them in. The heights frown on both side, and the rattle of Egypt’s war chariots is behind. How came Moses to so play the fool and bring them here? Were there no graves in Egypt that thus he brought them forth to die in the Red Sea? The answer of Moses is the quiet reflection that he did it at Jehovah’s word, and God justifies that word, for the sea opens a wide highway for the elect of God, and they march joyfully through, and with timbrels and dances on the other side they sing unto the Lord who has triumphed gloriously. If in later days you find Joshua compassing Jericho, and not assailing it with battering rams, but only with one great blast of trumpets, his reason is that God has spoken to him by His word. And so right on, for time would fail me to speak of Samson, Jephthah, and Barak, these men did what they did at God’s word, and doing it, the Lord was with them. Is it bringing things down from the sublime to the ridiculous to talk of Peter and the net which he casts over the side of his little boat? Oh, no. We are ourselves ridiculous when we do not make our own lives sublime by the obedience of faith. Certainly, there may be as much sublimity in casting a net as in building an ark, lifting a rod, or sounding a ram’s horn.

And it is clear that if it is done in faith, the simplest action of life may be sublimely great. The flash of the wave as it covers Peter's net may be as sublime before the Lord as the glory of the Red Sea billow when it returned in its strength. God, who sees a world in a drop, sees wonders in the smallest act of faith. Do not, I pray you, think that sublimity lies in masses, to be measured by a scale, so that a mile shall be sublime and an inch shall be absurd. We measure not morals and spirituals by rods and chains. The common act of fishing at Christ's word links Peter with all the principalities, and powers, and forces which in all ages have known this as their only law—"He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." We too shall have fellowship with the sublime if we know how to be perfectly obedient to the word of the Lord.

This ought to be the rule of all Christians for the whole of their lives—"At Your word." This should direct us in the church and in the world. It should guide us in our spiritual beliefs and in our secular acts, "At Your word." I wish it were so. We hear boasts that the Bible and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants. It is a mere boast. Few Protestants can honestly repeat the assertion. They have other books to which they pay deference, and other rules, other guides, beyond and above, and even in opposition to the one Word of God. It ought not to be so. The power of the church and the power of the individual to please God shall never be fully known till we get back to the simple yet sublime rule of our text, "At Your word."

I am going to hammer upon that phrase this morning as God shall help me, "At Your word." This rule has many applications. First, I shall somewhat repeat myself by saying that it ought to apply to the affairs of ordinary life. Secondly, it should apply to matters of spiritual profiting. And thirdly, and

here I shall enlarge, it ought to find its chief application in our great life business, which is being fishers of men.

I. “At Your word” should apply **TO ALL THE AFFAIRS OF ORDINARY LIFE**. I mean, first, as to continuance in honest industry. “Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.” Many a man in the present trying crisis is half ready to throw up his work, and run away from his business, because he has toiled all night and taken nothing. Truly, the financial darkness has lasted long, and does not yet yield to the dawn, but yet Christians must not murmur or leave their posts. Oh tried ones, continue to be diligent in your business, still provide things honest in the sight of all men. Labor on in hope. Say as Peter did, “Nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.” “Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.” You know that truth full well. Know this also, that the Lord will not forsake His people. Your best endeavors will not of themselves bring you prosperity. Still, do not relax those endeavors. As God’s word to you is to quit yourselves like men, and be strong, gird up the loins of yours mind, be sober and stand fast. Throw not away your shield, cast not away your confidence, but stand steadily in your rank till the tide of battle turns. God has placed you where you are; move not till His providence calls you. Do not run before the cloud. Take down the shutters tomorrow morning, and display your goods, and let not despondency drive you to anything that is rash or unseemly. Say, “Nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.”

If I am speaking to those who are out of work just now, searching for some place where they can provide bread for themselves and for their families, as is their duty, let them hear and ponder. If any man does not do his best to provide for his own household, he comes not under a gospel blessing, but he is said to be worse than a heathen man and a publican—it is

the duty of us all to labor with our hands for that which is good, that we may have to give to the needy as well as to those dependent on us. If after having gone about this city till your feet are blistered you can find nothing to do, do not sit at home next Monday sulkily saying, "I will not try again." Apply my text to this painful trial, and yet again sally forth in hope, saying with Peter, "We have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." Let men see that a Christian is not readily driven to despair. No, let them see that when the yoke is made heavier, the Lord has a secret way of strengthening the backs of His children to bear their burdens. If the Holy Spirit shall make you calmly resolute, you will honor God much more by your happy perseverance than the talkative by their fine speeches, or the formalist by their outward show. Common life is the true place in which to prove the truth of godliness and bring glory to God. Not by doing extraordinary works, but by the piety of ordinary life is the Christian known and his religion honored. At God's word hold on even to the end. "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shall you dwell in the land, and verily you shall be fed."

It may be, too, that you have been endeavoring in your daily life to acquire skill in your business, and you have not succeeded, or you have tried to acquire more knowledge, so that you could better fulfill your vocation, but up to now you have not prospered as you wish. Do not, therefore, cease from your efforts. Christians must never be idlers. Our Lord Jesus would never have it said that His disciples are a sort of cowards who, if they do not succeed the first time, will never try again. We are to be patterns of all the moral virtues as well as of the spiritual graces. Therefore at the bidding of the Lord, work on with mind and hand, and look to Him for the blessing. "At His word" let down the net once more; He may intend to bless you

largely when by trial you have been prepared to bear the benediction.

This will apply very closely to those who are laboring hard in the training of children. It may be that with your own children you may not have succeeded yet, the boy's spirit may still be wild and proud, and the girl may not yet have yielded to obedience and submission. Or you may be working in the Sunday school, or in the day school, trying to impart knowledge, and to fashion the youthful minds aright, and you may have been baffled. But if it is your business to teach, do not be overcome. Stand to your work as though you heard Jesus say, "Whatever you do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men," earnestly then at His word again let down the net.

I counsel you, dear friends, in everything to which you set your hands, if it is a good thing, do it with all your might. And if it is not a good thing, have nothing to do with it. It may be possible that you are called to teach the age some moral truth. In most generations individuals have been called to carry out reforms, and to promote progress. You are bound to love your neighbor as yourself, therefore as you have opportunity do good unto all men. If you have tried, and up to now have not won a hearing, do not give up your point, if it is a good thing and you are a Christian man, never let it be said that you were afraid or ashamed. I admire in Palissy the potter, not only his Christianity, which could not be overcome by persecution, but his perseverance in his own business of making pottery. His last farthing and his last breath would have gone in discovering a glaze, or bringing out a color. I love to see such men believers. I should not like to see our Lord followed by a set of cowards who could not fight the common battles of life, how should such as these become worthy of the lordlier chivalry which wrestles with spiritual wickedness in high places? It is for us to be bravest among the brave in the plains of common life, that

when we are summoned to higher fields, where still greater deeds are needed, we may go there trained for the higher service.

Does it seem to you to be a little out of place to be talking thus from the pulpit? I do not think so. I notice how in the Old Testament we are told of the sheep and the cattle, and the fields and the harvests of good men, and these had to do with their religion. I notice how the prudent woman according to Solomon looked well to her household. And I observe that we have in the Bible a book of Proverbs, and another called Ecclesiastes, with little spiritual teaching in them, but a great deal of good, sound, practical common sense. It is evident to me that the Lord intends that our faith should not be penned up in a pew, but should walk the shop, and be seen in every walk of life. The great principle of my text fell from the lips of a working man, and to the working man I return it. It was connected with a net and a boat, the implements of Peter's labor, and with these common things I would link it. And I would say to all who serve the Lord, in this present evil world—in the name of God, if you have anything to do, be not so desponding and despairing as to cease from it, but, according to His word, once more go forward in your honest endeavors, and like Peter, say, "I will let down the net." This may prove a word in season to some who are weary of the hardness of the times. I shall rejoice if it nerves an arm or cheers a heart. Have faith in God, my tried brethren. "Be you steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."

II. IN MATTERS OF SPIRITUAL PROFITING we must at the word of Christ let down the net again. I put this, first, to those who have been up to this Tabernacle a great many times, heartily, if I am to believe them, hoping to find salvation. You have prayed before the sermon began that the Lord would really bless the sermon to you. Now, mark, I do not understand

you at all, I cannot make you out, because the way of salvation is open to you at this very moment, and it is, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.” You have nothing to wait for, and all your waiting is sinful. If you say, you are waiting for the stirring of the pool, I tell you, there is no pool to be stirred, and no angel to stir it. That pool was dried up long ago, and angels never go that way now. Our Lord Jesus Christ shut up Bethesda when He came, and said to the man lying there, “Rise, take up your bed, and walk.” That is what He says to you. You have no business waiting, but as you are, and are here this morning, I would earnestly invite you at the word of Christ, who has bid us preach the gospel to every creature—“believe and live.” Let down the net once more, and let it down this way, say, “My Lord, I believe. Help You my unbelief.” Breathe a prayer to Jesus that He would accept you. Submit yourself to Him, and beseech Him to become now at this very moment your Savior. You will be heard. Plenty of fish are waiting to be taken in the net of faith. At the Lord’s word, let it down.

But I will now speak to others present, who have been letting down their nets, in vain perhaps, in the form of persistent prayer. Have you been praying for the conversion of a relative, or pleading for some other good thing which you believe to be according to the will of God, and after long pleading—pleading into the night, for your spirit has been sad—are you tempted never to offer that petition anymore? Now, then, at Christ’s word, who said that men ought always to pray and not to faint—at Christ’s word, who says, “Pray without ceasing,” let down the net, and pray again. Not because the circumstances which surround you are more favorable, but simply because Jesus bids you, continue in prayer, and who knows but that this very time you will meet with success!

Or have you been searching the Scriptures to find a promise which will suit your case? Do you want to get hold of some good word from God that will cheer you? Shoals of such fish are around your boat. The sea of Scripture is full of them, fish of promise, I mean, but, alas, you cannot catch one of them. Nevertheless, try again. Go home this afternoon, and search the Scriptures again with prayer, and beseech the Holy Spirit to apply a precious portion to your heart, that you may by faith enjoy the sweetness of it, and who knows but you shall this very day obtain your desire, and receive a larger blessing than your mind can fully contain, so that in your case also the net shall break through the fullness of the favor.

Or it may be you have been laboring a long while after some holy attainment. You want to conquer a besetting sin, to exercise firmer faith, to exhibit more zeal, and to be more useful, but you have not yet gained your desire. Now, then, since it is the Lord's mind that you should be "perfect in every good work to do His will," do not cease from your purpose, but at His word let down your net again. Never despair. That temper of yours will be conquered yet. That unbelief of yours will give way to holy faith. Let down the net, and all the graces may yet be taken in it, to be yours for the rest of your life. Only at Christ's word still labor for the best things, and He will give them to you.

Or are you seeking just now the closer presence of Christ and a nearer fellowship with Him? Are you yearning after a sight of His face—that face which outshines the morning? Do you wish to be brought into His banqueting house to be satiated with His love? And have you cried in vain? Then cry once more, "at His word," for He bids you come to Him. His loving voice invites you to draw near. At His word press forward once again, let down the net once more, and joys

unspeakable await you, surpassing all you have up to now experienced.

Thus you see that there is a just application of the great principle of the text to our spiritual profiting. God help us by His gracious Spirit to carry it out from day to day.

III. The great principle of our text should be applied to **OUR LIFE BUSINESS**. And what is the life business of every Christian here? Is it not soul-winning? That we may glorify God by the bringing of others to the faith of Christ is the great objective of our remaining here on earth, otherwise we would have been caught up to swell the harmony of the heavenly songs. It is expedient for many wandering sheep here below that we should tarry here till we have brought them home to the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls.

Our way of winning men for Christ, or, to use His own metaphor, our method of catching men, is by letting down the net of the gospel. We have learned no other way of holy fishing. Men with great zeal and little knowledge are inventing ingenious methods for catching men, but for my part I believe in nothing but letting down the gospel net, by telling out the story of the love of God to men in Christ Jesus. No new gospel has been committed to us by Jesus, and He has authorized no new way of making it known. Our Lord has called all of us to the work of proclaiming free pardon through His blood to all who believe in Him. Each believer has a warrant to seek the conversion of his fellows. May not every man seek to save his brother from the burning? Must not Jesus smile on any man's endeavor to deliver his neighbor from going down to eternal death? Has He not said, "Let him that hears say, Come"? Whoever hears the gospel is to invite others to come to Christ. The word of the Lord is our warrant for keeping to our one work of making known the gospel, it would be a sorry act of mutiny if we were either to be silent, or to preach another

gospel which is not another. The word of the Lord is a warrant which justifies the man who obeys it. "Where the word of a king is, there is power." What higher authority can we need? "Oh, but," they say, "you ought to advance to something higher than the mere elementary doctrine of grace, and give the people something more in keeping with the progress of the period." We shall not do so while Jesus bids us go into the entire world and preach the gospel to every creature. If we do what He bids us, the responsibility of the matter rests no longer with us. Whatever comes of it we are clear if we have obeyed orders. A servant is not to justify his master's message, but to deliver it. This makes it a joy to preach, this doing it "at Your word." Our business is to do what Christ tells us, as Christ tells us, and to do this again and again, so long as we have breath in our bodies. The commanding word cries always to us, "Preach the gospel; preach the gospel to every creature!" Our justification for setting forth Christ crucified and incessantly bidding men believe and live, lies in that same word which bade Peter walk the sea, and bade Moses fetch water out of a rock.

The result of this preaching will justify Him who commanded it. No man at the last will be able to say to the Savior, "You set Your servants an impossible task, and You gave them an instrument to wield which was not at all adapted to produce its end." No, but at the closing of all things it shall be seen that for the salvation of the elect there was nothing better than a crucified Savior, and to make that crucified Savior known there was no better means than the simple proclamation of His word by honest lips in the power of the Spirit of the Lord. The foolishness of preaching will turn out to be the great proof of the wisdom of God. Brethren, you that teach in the school, or you that preach from the pulpit, or distribute tracts, or speak personally to individuals, you need not be afraid but what wisdom will exonerate herself from all charges, and

vindicate her own methods. You may be called a fool today for preaching the gospel, but that accusation, like rust on a sword, will wear off as you use the weapon in the wars of the Lord. The preaching of the word soon puts down all clamors against itself; those clamors mainly arise because it is not preached. No one calls the gospel ineffective where it is smiting right and left like a great two-handed sword. Our reply to the outcry about the failure of the pulpit is to get into it and preach with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven.

Indeed, this word of Christ, whereby He gives us His warrant for letting down the net, is such that it amounts to a command, and it will leave us guilty if we do not obey. Suppose Simon Peter had said, “We have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; and therefore, notwithstanding Your word, I will not let down the net”? Then Simon Peter had been guilty of disobedience to His Lord, and blasphemy against the Son of God. What shall I say to any of my fellow Christians who profess to be called of God, and to be Christ’s disciples, and yet never do let down the net? Is it so that you are doing nothing for the truth? That you never disseminate the gospel? Is it so that you call yourselves lights of the world, and yet never shine? That you are sowers of the seed, and yet forget that you have a seed basket? Am I addressing any members of this church who are in this respect wasting their lives? Is it so that it is professedly your life’s objective to be fishers of men, and yet you have never cast a net, nor even helped to draw one on shore? Are you dwelling among us under false pretences? Are you mocking God by a fruitless profession which you never try to make fruitful? I have not the strength with which to condemn you, but I would to God your own conscience might fulfill that office. What shall be said of the man to whom the Lord gives charge that he shall make known the glad tidings of salvation from eternal misery, and yet he is sinfully silent? The

great Physician has entrusted you with the medicine which heals the sick, you see them die about you, but never speak of the remedy! The great King has given you the meal with which to feed the hungry, and you lock the storehouse door, while the crowds are starving in your streets. Is not this a crime which may well make a man of God weep over you? This great London of ours is growing heathenish to the very core, and yet our Lord has given the gospel into the hands of His churches. What can be the reason for the indifference of the godly? If we keep this gospel to ourselves, truly coming ages will condemn us as cruel to our posterity. Succeeding generations will point to our era and say, "What sort of men were these that had the light, and shut it up in a dark lantern?" In a century to come, when others shall stand in this city, and walk these streets, they will say, "A curse upon the memory of the ministers and people who failed in their duty, which came to the kingdom in a solemn time, but never realized their calling, and so missed the end and objective of their being!" May we be spared from such a calamity as this. Yes, we have a warrant for laboring to spread the truth of God, and more than a warrant, we have a statute from the throne, a peremptory command, and it is woe to us if we preach not the gospel.

Now, brethren, this warrant from Christ is one which, if we are in the state of heart of Simon Peter, will be omnipotent with us this morning. It was very powerful with Simon Peter. For, observe, he was under the influence of a great disappointment, yet he let down the net. "We have toiled all the night." Some say, "We have had this entire gospel preaching, we have had all these revivals, all these stirs, and nothing has come of it." When was that? I hear a good deal of this talk, but what are the facts? "Oh," you say, "you know we have had a great deal of revival a little while ago." I do not know anything of the sort. We have had flashes of light here and there,

but comparatively so little that it is a pity to make so much of it. Moreover, considering the little that has ever been done for it, the spread of the gospel has been marvelous. Look at gospel work at the present moment in India! People say that the Christian faith is not spreading. I say that it is spreading wonderfully as compared with the labor expended and the sacrifice made. If in that land you spend a penny and get a thousand pounds, you have no right to say, "What is that? We want a million." If your desires are thus exacting, prove their sincerity by corresponding action. Increase your outlay. The harvest is wonderful considering the little seed, but if you wish for more sheaves sow more. The church has had an enormous return for what little she has done. In England there have been partial revivals, but to what have they amounted? A flash of light has been seen in a certain district, but darkness has still remained supreme over the length and breadth of the country. The papers have reported a great work in a certain spot, but if the papers had reported the places wherein there has been no revival, we should have had a different view of things! A little corner at the top of a column would have sufficed for the good, and column after column would not have sufficed to make known the black side of the situation. The fact is the church has scarcely ever been in a state of universal revival since the day of Pentecost. There has been a partial moving among Christians every now and then, but the whole mass throughout has never burned and flamed with the earnestness which the grand cause demands. Oh, that the Lord would set the whole church on fire! We have no cause whatever for disappointment. In proportion to the little effort put out, great things have come to us, therefore let us get to our nets again, and say no more about the night in which we have toiled.

But next, this command in Peter overcame his love of ease. Evidently he was tired when he said, "We have toiled all the

night." Fishing is hard work, especially when no fish are caught. It is natural to wish to be excused from further toil when you are already weary with unrewarded labor. I have heard some Christians say, "You know I had my time in the Sunday school years ago, and then I used to work too much for my strength." No doubt their efforts were stupendous in the remote ages of their youthful zeal; we can hardly imagine what they must have been like, for no relic remains to assist our conceptions. At this time they feel authorized to take things easy, for they owe no more to their Lord, or at least they do not intend to pay any more. Is it so that any one of us can cease from service when it is plain that we do not cease from receiving mercy at the Lord's hands? Are we not ashamed of the case when it is plainly put? "Take it easy." Yes, soon, very soon, we shall take it easy, for there will be rest enough in the grave. Just now while souls of men are perishing, to relax our efforts is wickedness. No, no, Peter, although you may be now in a dripping sweat through having toiled all night, you must get at it again. He does so. The night's work is nothing; he must work in the day too, if he is to catch fish.

Moreover, the command of Christ was so supreme over Peter that he was not held back by carnal reason, for reason would say, "If you could not catch fish in the night, you will certainly not do so in the day." Night was the special time for taking fish on the Gennesaret Lake, and by day, when the garish sun was lighting up the waves, and letting the fish see every single mesh of the net, they were not likely to come into it, but when Christ commands, the most unlikely time is likely, and the most unpromising sphere becomes hopeful. No act is out of season when Christ commands it. If He says, "Go," go at once, without deliberation. Say not, "There are yet four months and then comes harvest." "The fields are white already to the

harvest.” Peter lets down the net at once, and wisely does he act at Christ’s word.

The lesson to you and to me is this, let us do as Peter did, and let down the net personally, for the apostle said, “I will let down the net.” Brother, cannot you do something, yourself, with your own heart, lips and hands? Sister, cannot you do something yourself with your own gentle spirit? “I was thinking about getting half a dozen friends to form a committee to relieve the poor around us.” Nothing will ever come of it; the poor will not get a basin of soup or a loaf of bread. Set about it yourself. “But I think I might get a dozen to come together and organize a Society.” Yes, and then more resolutions and amendments all day long, and finish up with passing votes of mutual approbation. You had better get to work yourself as Peter did.

And you had better do it at once, for Peter immediately let down the net, as soon as he had launched out into the deep. You may never have another opportunity, your zeal may have evaporated, or your life may be over. Peter, however, only let down one net, and there was the pity of it. If John and James and all the rest had let down their nets, the result would have been much better. “Why?” you ask, because, through there being only one net, that net was overstrained, and broke. If all the nets had been used, they might have taken more fish, and no net would have been broken. I was reading some time ago of a catch of mackerel at Brighton. When the net was full, the mackerel sticking in all the meshes made it so heavy that the fishermen could not raise it, and the boat itself was in some danger of going down, so they had to cut away the net and lose the fish. Had there been many nets and boats, they might have buoyed up the whole of the fish, and so they might have done in this case. As it was, many fish were lost through the breaking of the net. If a church can be so awakened that each individual

gets to work in the power of the Holy Spirit, and all the individuals combine, then how many souls will be captured for Jesus! Multitudes of souls are lost to the blessed gospel because of our broken nets, and the net gets broken because we are not well united in the holy service, and by our lack of wisdom, causes loss to our Master's cause. Ministers need not become worn out with labor if all would take their share. One boat would not begin to sink if the other boats took a part of the blessed load.

Now, brothers and sisters, I close by saying that if I have accomplished anything this morning by the help of God's Spirit, I hope I have made you ready to accept the following directory of service drawn from the text. The way in which to serve God is to do it at His word. I pray that none of us may sink into serving the Lord as a matter of routine. May we never fall to serving Him in our own strength. We must preach, teach, and labor in His name, because we hear Him bidding us do it. We must act at His word. If this were the case we should work with much more faith, with much more earnestness, and with much more likelihood of success. It is a blessed thing to see Christ sitting in the boat while you cast out the net. If you catch a glimpse of His approving smile as He watches you, you will work right heartily. We must labor in entire dependence upon Him, not preaching or teaching because in our judgment it is the right thing to do—Peter did not think so—but because Jesus gives the word, and His word is law. You may not work because you have any expectation of success from the excellence of your work, or from the nature of the people among whom you labor, but because Jesus has given you the word. You stand there doing a thing which critics sneer at as absurd, but you do it in all confidence, believing that it must be wise because Jesus bids you do it. I remember well how some of our brethren used to talk to us. They said, "You preach the

gospel to dead sinners. You bid them repent and believe. You might just as well shake a pocket handkerchief over a grave and bid the corpse come out of it.” Exactly so. They spoke the truth, but then I would delight to go and shake a pocket handkerchief over graves and bid the dead live if Jesus bade me do so. I would expect to see the cemetery crack and heave from end to end if I were sent on such an errand by the Lord. I would accept the duty joyfully. The more absurd the wise men of our age make the gospel out to be, and the more they show that it is powerless to produce the designed end, the more will we persevere in our old method of preaching Jesus Crucified. Our resolves are not to be shaken by that mode of reasoning. We never did draw our argument for preaching the gospel from the work, itself, but from the orders given us to do it, and we would rather be acting upon the responsibility of Christ than upon our own. I would rather be a fool and do what Christ tells me, than be the wisest man of the modern school, and despise the word of the Lord. I would rather lay the responsibility of my life at the feet of Him who bids me live according to His word than seek out an objective in life for myself, and feel that the responsibility rested on my own shoulders. Let us be willing to be under orders to Christ, willing to persevere under difficulties, willing to begin anew in His service from this very hour. Amen.

1655 THE GUEST DETAINED – LUKE 24:28-29

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, April 23, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further. But they constrained him, saying, “Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.” And he went in to tarry with them. — Luke 24:28-29

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Psalm 31]

WHAT A BLESSED WALK was that from Jerusalem to Emmaus! Were they not highly favored men to have such a companion as the Lord Jesus, to hear Him converse upon such a subject, and to feel their hearts burning within them with so divine a flame? Brethren, these are not the only men who have walked with the Lord Jesus. I trust I look into the eyes of full many who can say, “We, too, have communed with the Son of the Highest, the eyes of our faith have seen Him, and our ears have heard His voice.” We have known that Jesus Himself drew near, and we have heard the words of Holy Scripture as though they fell fresh from His lips, and thus they have, by the power of the Holy Spirit, burned in our hearts, and made our hearts to burn like coals of juniper which have a most vehement flame.

Thank God, our divine Master is still the familiar friend of His disciples, and our life-walk is with Him. In one sense, “He is not here, for he is risen,” but in another sense He is more peculiarly here because He has risen, and whereas unrisen He could only have been in one place at a time, now that He is risen He is by His Spirit present with thousands of His people at the same moment, and He walks not only from Jerusalem to Emmaus, but to many a village, through many a garden, along many a street. Jesus delights to manifest Himself to His people, He is not strange unto His own flesh. We are bound to bear witness to the fact that He is not ashamed to call us brethren, and to be found walking with us.

Yea, even to those who are not His people Jesus comes very near at times, and though they know Him not He walks at their side, and this not in silence, for He instructs them by His word and makes their hearts warm by His sacred influence. I pray that any remark this morning which shall be made to believers may also lay hold of those attentive hearers to whom the kingdom has come very near, for some of you have often been moved in this house of prayer as you have heard Jesus speak, and speak to you, and if you have not been able to call Him friend, yet you have heartily wished you could do so.

You have been more than half inclined to cast in your lot with His disciples because their Master has warmed your hearts, if He has not made them burn, and if there has not been the glow of life yet there have been many flickering desires. I pray that Jesus may never leave you, but that your intimacy with Him may be growing, till at last you shall know Him and He shall know you, and there shall be a union formed between you which never shall be broken.

To return to that walk to Emmaus. How short it must have seemed, by far too short for hearts so sad, who at every step found solace. I forget how many miles it was just now. It does

not matter. I should think it seemed as if it had scarce begun when it ended, with such light feet they tripped over that pathway, that they thought Emmaus had been attracted nearer to the city. It was so short because it was so sweet, the conversation was such as good men prize more than dainties. The intonations of that voice must often have awakened memories within them which half compelled them to recognize their Lord, His sweet voice must have charmed them, and the words He uttered, the wondrous words of exposition and consolation, how much they enriched them!

Nor was that walk more sweet than solemn, for it is no small thing to walk with the risen Son of God. Kings might fling their crowns away to enjoy five minutes of such honor, it was nothing less than sublime. Those brethren must often during the rest of their lives have looked at each other and said, “We walked with Jesus.” I should think whenever they met, their conversation would have in it fresh recollections of that walk, and each one would say to his fellow, “Brother, I have just remembered a point whereon the Lord spoke to us. Do you not recollect the significant hint which He gave us as to the meaning of the prophet?”

If you and I had ever actually walked with Jesus, I am half afraid we might have grown proud of it, at any rate, if we were helped not to be proud, yet it would always be a sublime memory. How sublime a thing to have kept pace with incarnate Deity, and marched foot to foot with Him who is God over all, blessed forever! No angel has ever walked with Jesus, they cast their crowns before Him, and fly upon His errands, but He has not given unto angels the privilege of such familiar intercourse. How solemn to those who all unwittingly had enjoyed it!

I think when they knew Him they must have been overwhelmed with the thought that they had been so near, and they must have feared in the silence of their souls that possibly

they had been rashly familiar. Surely they said each one to himself, “Did we say anything improper? Was it this which made Him call us fools? When we were expressing our doubts, did we not grieve Him? Alas, that we should have so misbehaved ourselves!” They must have looked back upon that high honor with great awe, even as Jacob did after he had communed with God at Bethel, and said, “Surely the Lord was in this place; and I knew it not. How dreadful is this place! this is none other than the house of God, and the very gate of heaven.”

Brethren, it is a great thing to come near to Christ, and you who have not yet believed in Him, I should like you to feel in what a solemn position you have sometimes been placed when “He has been evidently set forth, crucified among you!” and you have felt somewhat of that presence. Jesus does not draw nigh to a man for nothing, He has an influence upon all whom He visits. Your sense of His presence has left upon you a deep responsibility, especially if you have remained chill under the influence of His holy love and have refused to believe in Him. Oh, that you would think of this! Ere our Lord passes on and leaves you to your own devices, I would have you know that the King of heaven has been very nigh to you. Oh that you would cry out to Him, nor cease the cry till He comes and abides with you!

I. This must suffice for an introduction. Oh that the Spirit of God may give the sermon. My subject runs thus, first, observe in the text, **COMPANIONS LIKELY TO PART.**

The walk had come to an end, for they had reached Emmaus whither they went, and now the Master made as if He would have gone further, and so the holy talk was likely to end. Jesus is going on, and they may never see Him again. The choicest of all conversations now draws to a close unless the speaker can be induced to stop with the two favored travelers.

We are told that our Lord Jesus would have gone further. He did not pretend that He would have gone, but He was actually going. It is the way of Him not to stay anywhere except He is invited and pressed. I know not whither He would have gone, but with that glorified body of His He was under no necessity of finding shelter, He could have gone further and lodged elsewhere, or He could have suddenly returned to Jerusalem and in a moment have entered into the apostles' meeting room though the doors were shut. It would not have been the first night that—

“Cold mountains and the midnight air
Witnessed the fervor of His prayer.”

Certainly He would have gone further, He says not whither, but He knew right well. Under the circumstances, He and His companions seemed likely to part.

Now, observe *the reason of parting*. They were not about to separate because of any ill-will on the part of those who had walked with Him. No anger had broken out, nothing that He had said had aroused any animosity—very, very far from it, they felt an intense reverence for the unknown stranger, and sincere gratitude to Him for the charming words which He had addressed them. He was likely to have gone further, but not because of any rupture between them. Nor would they have divided because of any weariness of Him on their part, He had not prosed away and tired them out so that they would be glad to see the back of Him.

The rest of the narrative shows that they were in a very different condition of heart from that. If Jesus had gone further they would have lost His delightful society sheerly through forgetfulness. Turning into his house—for I suppose one of them lived there, and there does not appear to have been

anybody else in the house—one of them spread the simple repast for his friend, and what if in his care about the evening meal he had forgotten to invite the wonderful stranger? If Jesus had gone further, it would have been entirely because they forgot to invite Him, or failed to urge Him to stay. They could not have felt an utter indifference to Him, but they might have forgotten to press their hospitality upon Him.

Many have short memories when hospitality is concerned. Sometimes we have failed to invite a friend when he needed our kindness, and we have felt sorry for it afterwards. They might have supposed that if He went further, so important a person was too great to tarry with them, and perhaps so wise a person had an errand further on which required immediate dispatch, and therefore He could not remain with them. Thus they might have let Him go. Had they lost Him it would have been simply through forgetfulness and inadvertence.

Brothers and sisters, I hope there are very few of us who love the Lord, who are likely ever to lose communion with Him through any weariness of Him, or distaste of Him. Oh no, the happiest moments we have ever had have been spent in Jesus' company, and we are never so blessed as when He opens the Scriptures to us, and opens our hearts to receive them. But we are in danger lest in the press of worldly cares, lest in our frequent conversations with our fellow men, lest even in our attendances upon the domestic concerns of our own little home, we may forget to invite Jesus to abide with us.

Communion with the Lord is oftener broken by want of thought than by want of heart, though, alas, when the want of thought has let Him "go further," then it has cooled down into that rock of ice which we have called a want of heart. Therefore brothers and sisters, let us charge our hearts that we do never forget to entertain the Savior. Let this be our first thought—that we give Jesus lodging in our souls. Be this our morning

prayer, “Abide with us,” be this our evening petition, “Abide with us,” be this the prayer of all the day long, “Abide with us.”

May we resolve that under no circumstances will we permit our souls to be at rest unless we rest in Him, or to be happy except He shall be our joy. You see, if the two disciples had lost our Lord’s company it would have been simply through neglect, and if you and I lose Him it may be through a neglect which we think excusable because we were so very busy, and so intensely occupied, but this will not alter the fact, nor bring back our Lord. Oh do not let us treat Him so ill.

Are there other objects beneath the sun or above the sun, on earth or in heaven that are worthy to come between us and Christ even for a single moment? Will a wife treat her loving husband with coldness, and then excuse herself that she had other matters on her hands? It may be so, but never, never let the Lord’s redeemed treat their Redeemer as though He might be left in any hole or corner till a more convenient time.

The point at which they were at all likely to part company with Christ is worth noting, for it may give us timely warning.

It was, first, a point of change. They had been walking with Him, and the journey was over. They had been out of doors, but now they have come to their house and are about to enter. Always there is a danger to us of missing fellowship with Christ at points of change, and especially at seasons of greatly altered circumstances. I do not wish, brethren, that you and I should be often transplanted, trees do not flourish well when this happens to them.

I knew a friend who appeared to be wedded to the Gospel, and was zealous in promoting it when he was persecuted very severely by his father. His father died, and he inherited the old man’s property, and from that hour he was not seen in his former place, nor did he manifest any love to the Lord. This is sad. I would hardly dare to pray for some men that they might

have a change from persecution to prosperity, plants that flourish amid ice and snow are burned up when placed beneath a tropical sun. I have known those who appeared to love their Master right heartily when they were poor who have become rich, and now where is their ardor? I hope they have not altogether cast off affection for the sacred name, but certainly the people with whom they once associated know nothing of them now, and they are not engaged in those holy works in which they formerly delighted. How dare I pray for the temporal prosperity of those who would degenerate beneath its influence?

On the other hand, I have known many who once were in comfortable circumstances, and when prosperous they appeared to walk with God, as far as we could judge they were patterns of godliness, but they fell upon hard times, and they grew poorer and poorer, till they tasted the bitterness of want, and now they say they do not like to be seen by those who knew them, and therefore, they stay away from the house of God. They have lost the comforts of religion when they most need them, lost worldly substance, and alas, lost fellowship with Christ as well.

This is equally sad, for whether Jesus leaves us at the golden gate, or at the broken-down door of poverty, His departure is equally a calamity. I am mentioning facts. I give no names, but I have seen these things many times, and therefore I have drawn this deduction, that at points of change there is danger. I suppose there is upon the railway a measure of peril at the switches where the train is turned upon another line, and it is certainly so on the main line to glory. At all times it is well to watch, but especially when we are entering upon new duties, new trials, and new temptations. Lord, let not the novelty of our position fascinate us even for a moment, but evermore do You abide with us.

It was a point too, where something had been accomplished. They had finished their journey and reached their homes. Oh, we are such poor things that we can hardly complete anything without being self-satisfied. As little a thing as a finished walk will exalt little minds, but if it is some greater work, the peril is increased. When Christ said, “It is finished,” He opened a river of comfort, but when we exclaim, “I have finished it,” we too often set our minds on fire with pride.

Certain men have undertaken a work for Jesus and they have done it by the Holy Spirit’s blessing, and now they feel so pleased with themselves and so satisfied that they are likely to spoil all, and give their Lord occasion for grief. The lowly Jesus does not seek self-exalting companions. I have known Him go many a mile to speak with the contrite, and it is His delight to dwell with the broken-hearted, but with those who have done something, and therefore feel that they do not further need His presence, He soon parts company. Nothing drives Christ and holy angels out of a room like the foul odor of pride.

Then, dear friends, they were now about to rest for a time. They had reached home, and they looked for repose after the excitements of the week. They had been detained at Jerusalem by grand yet terrible events, and one of them was glad that day to lodge in his own house, as for the other, he was glad to get out of the city and retire with his friend for a little till good news should come from the apostles. They both hoped for a little peace. Just then the Master made as though He would have gone further, and when you and I are promising ourselves repose, such as we have known little of upon earth, it is well at such times to specially ask the Master to abide with us.

When we are in the battle we are sure to beg Him to abide with us, because He covers our head, and we cannot live without Him, and when we are proceeding in a weary walk we are likely to pray Him to remain with us, for we are then leaning

on our Beloved, but when we sit down upon the seat of ease, sleep too often creeps over us. Having put off our traveling sandals, and stretched ourselves at ease, ah, then there is the possibility, the sad possibility, of the Master's going further while we take our rest.

He is always going further, and when we resolve to go no further, but to consider ourselves to have attained, then our Lord will soon be gone. We must not take the motto of the famous statesman who has been so often laughed at for his finality, we must not say, "Rest and be thankful," or we shall soon come to grief. If we fall into that vein, it is well to remember that just at such a point Jesus and the disciple are apt to break fellowship. I mention this that we may be wise in the hour of trial.

Now, had they parted company, *the act would have been most blameworthy on their part*. To have lost the society of such a friend, how foolish! Here was one who had instructed them with tenderness and skill—one who spoke as never man spoke, would they let Him go? Here was one who evidently could explain their mysterious sorrows, and take the sting out of their griefs, and would they let Him pass on? They had been fools indeed if they had done so. It would have shown that they did not appreciate His teaching, nor feel grateful for His opening to them the Scriptures. It would have been gross folly.

And yet there is another thought. It was toward evening, and night was lowering, and therefore they said, "Abide with us: for the day is far spent." It would have been very cruel to have allowed Him to journey on in the dark and the dews. Would we thus treat any friend of ours? Could we allow a beloved one to abide abroad all night? Was not that His own argument in the Golden Cantic, when He knocked and said, "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for

my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night”?

It would have been inhospitable on their part, inhuman for them to leave Him to prosecute His journey in the darkness of the gathering night when they had a home in which they could entertain Him. And so I charge it upon my own soul never to let Jesus be left unhoused, a stranger who has not where to lay His head.

All hearts are cold in every place towards the Well-beloved, it is a cold world for Jesus today even as at the time of His life below. Then, “He came unto his own and his own received him not.” Let not that be said over again, and said of us who are in a more special sense His own than were His brethren according to the flesh. “Be you not forgetful to entertain strangers” is a Gospel command, but be you especially eager to entertain your Lord. Shall your Lord ever say to any of you who are called Christians, “I was a stranger, and you took me not in”? Oh, no, let us invite Him, beg Him, entreat Him, constrain Him to abide with us for His own dear sake, and let us give Him in our warm hearts the best entertainment that we can. Surely we never received such a guest before, and another such we shall never see again.

Men are willing to give up their estates and houses for a time to entertain royalty, and they reckon them to be increased in value when once a monarch has sojourned in them, and shall not we be more than willing to open wide our hearts, and minds, and homes, that Jesus may enter and be entertained by us as the King of kings? There is something, then, to be learned from companions likely to part. May the Holy Spirit sweetly teach us!

II. Now I change the scene, and notice next THE GUEST NEEDING TO BE PRESSED.

The guest is Jesus, and He is about to go further, and He will go further unless they invite Him, ay, unless, according to

the twenty-ninth verse they constrain Him. It is a very strong word that, “they constrained Him,” it is akin to the one which Jesus used when He said, “The kingdom of heaven suffers violence.” They not only invited Him, but they held Him, they grasped His hand, they tugged at His skirts, they said He should not go, they would not have it, the cold night should not accuse them of being churls: he should not go another yard along that dangerous road, they must have Him for a guest, and they would not take a denial.

Let us recollect why this guest needs constraining, and the first thought is, *He could not very well have tarried otherwise.* If I were a stranger and walked along the road with two persons who did not know me, if I were able to talk to them ever so instructively, I should not think of intruding into their house when the conversation was over. You never see anything in Jesus approaching roughness or want of delicacy, he exhibits the manners of the noblest man that ever lived. He does not force His acquaintance upon any, He goes where He is constrained.

Besides, what pleasure could it have been to Him or for them for Him to have lodged in their house if He had not been wanted? Without a welcome, few of us would care to accept lodging. Jesus therefore naturally, because the other thing was scarcely feasible, waited till He was asked, and even pressed, and had they not constrained Him, He would have gone further.

Remark that *this is a characteristic of the Son of God at all times.* I have not time this morning, otherwise I could show you that all through the Old Testament as well as the New, when the Lord reveals Himself in any visible form He has to be pressed ere He will abide with any. The Lord came to Abraham, and Abraham said, “My Lord, if now I have found favor in your sight, pass not away, I pray you, from your servant: let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: and I will fetch a morsel of bread,

and comfort your hearts; after that you shall pass on: for therefore are you come to your servant” (Gen. 18:3-5). Abraham constrains these wondrous guests, or otherwise they will pass on.

Look at chapter nineteen, and see what Lot did when two angels came to him. Even supposing these were nothing more than angels, they show the manners of the court of heaven, so that it is an equally good illustration for me. He said, “Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant’s house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and you shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night. And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house:” (verses 2-3).

Joseph was in this a type of Jesus, for you know how slow he seemed to reveal himself to his brethren, though all the while he was full of love to them. To Moses the Lord said, “Let me alone,” and only by mighty pleading could the man of God prevail. When an angel came to Manoah and his wife, to tell them about Samson, we find that He had to be detained, or else He would have departed speedily. “And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, I pray you, let us detain you, until we shall have made ready a kid for you.” (Judges 13:15-16). You see, the heavenly messenger needed to be detained, or He would have gone at once. And then comes in that instance of which you have already thought, when the angel said to Jacob, “Let me go, for the day breaks. And he said, I will not let you go, except you bless me.” It is clear that the Lord will be entreated of by the house of Israel to do good things for them. We shall have to cry—

“In vain Thou strugglest to get free,
I never will unloose my hold!

Are Thou the Man that died for me?
The secret of Thy love unfold:
Wrestling, I will not let Thee go,
Till I Thy name, Thy nature know.

I know Thee, Savior, who Thou art,
Jesus, the feeble sinner's Friend;
Nor will Thou with the night depart,
But stay and love me to the end;
Thy mercies never shall remove;
Thy nature and Thy name is love."

We know that our Lord had a shy habit, He often withdrew Himself, and the multitude sought after Him, He walked upon the sea, and they in the vessel saw Him and He would have gone by them, but they cried out to Him. The Syro-Phoenician woman, who sought for the healing of her daughter, found Him at first very cold to her, and only by the greatest faith did she win her desire. He needed earnest pressure ere He yielded to her request. The blind men cried unto Him for sight, but He passed on, till louder and louder yet went up their piteous cries, and they held Him, for Jesus stood still. The nobleman, when he came about his son pleaded with tears till he cried, "Lord, come down before my child die."

It has been often so with our gracious Lord, He would not come until He saw that the desire for Him was intense. He gives us two parables—one tells us of the man in bed who must be roused with many a knock and many a call ere he would rise to give bread to his friend who sought it, and the other parable is that of the unjust judge who must be wearied by the woman's importunate entreaties before he will vindicate her cause. From all this you see it is the Master's habit to hold back till He is pressed and constrained.

If we must give a reason for this I would remind you of the jealousy of His character. He is jealous of our love, He says, “Give me your heart,” and so He pauses awhile that He may see that we love His person and prize His benefits. Of old the Father said, “The LORD your God is a jealous God,” and Jesus, the incarnation of the divine love, has told us that “love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave,” and hence it is that He will not give His company to those who have no heart for it. You shall not have His smiles if the smiles of the world will do as well. If communion with worldlings will please you as much as communion with Him, you shall have none of His company. It is only when you languish for Him, sigh for Him, and cry for Him that He will abide with you.

He has another reason, and that is, His anxiety to do us good! He wisely wishes that we should value the mercy which He gives by being led to consider what a case we should be in if He did not give it. He stirs up our prayers and then answers them, and so we get a double blessing, the prayers themselves being of much service to us, and then the answer being all the more a blessing. It was good to these two disciples to be allowed to be hospitable, it was good for them to rouse themselves to entreat Him. They valued the company of Jesus all the more when they had hardly persuaded Him to sit at their table and partake of their simple meal. Now, beloved, let us look at Jesus in this light, and say within ourselves, “I am fearful lest I should do anything to excite His jealousy, and I am anxious to show my eager longing for His presence lest He should think me unkind. I would not make Him ‘go further’ and leave me, but I would hold Him fast, constraining Him to abide with me.”

III. I have said that here was a guest who needed pressing, there will be no necessity to enlarge upon the remark that here was **A GUEST WORTH PRESSING.**

He was indeed worth pressing when we consider what He had done for them. He had given them comfort and instruction, and He was worth detaining if only for that. Had they known Him they would have felt still more that they could not let Him go. Would they not have borne Him on their shoulders into the house, and said, “Good Master, we cannot think of letting You go, for You are He whom our souls love, our Master and our Lord, over whom we have been mourning as one dead, and lo, You are alive”? So much were they indebted to Him that they could not fail to make Him their guest.

They must press Him again, for how comfortless the house would have been without Him! I think I see those two disciples sitting down to their meal, supposing the Master had gone on. Suddenly one would have recollected, and said, “My heart feels heavy now that He is gone,” and the other would have said, “How came it that we let Him go? Why did we not entreat Him to stay the night with us?” Their meal would have half choked them, they would have gone to their beds and tossed about throughout a sleepless night if they had failed in hospitality to Him.

This is what has happened to some of us when we have carelessly let our Lord slip away, we have been like widows who have newly lost their husbands, sore in heart and desolate. “Should the children of the bridegroom fast?” Not while the bridegroom is with them, but if he be taken from them, then shall they fast. Better to have been outside in the open air, or to have gone further with the unknown traveler, than to have been comfortably housed, and to have treated Him ill. He was a guest worth constraining to remain when we think of the vacuum there would have been if He had gone further.

Besides, we know what they did not then know, that this unknown One would make Himself known to them, as He has done to us. Now knowing Him, as they knew Him afterwards

in the breaking of the bread, we ought to feel, we must feel, we do feel, that we cannot, will not let Him go, but will detain Him, for He is Christ our Lord.

I spoke at the beginning to some here who have never known our Lord, and yet He has been very close to them frequently, in hearing sermons, and the like. Dear friends, I earnestly beseech you to receive Christ as a stranger, and you shall soon know Him as a friend. You only know of my Lord, that He makes you have the heartburn every now and then, and when we talk about Him you go home very uncomfortable. How I wish that you knew Him better! Oh, that you would entertain Him, for then you would know His excellence! Bid Him come into your heart, and He will be infinitely more to you than He is now. You have no idea what He is, He seems a well-spoken friend, but He will prove to be a brother, He promises now to instruct you, but He will love you, enrich you, and glorify you.

Oh dear child of God, not well-instructed yet, your eyes holden and you see not Jesus as you shall see Him, still I pray you heartily entertain the Savior, even if your eyes be holden. Take Him in, and let Him still lodge with you, and you will know more and yet more of Him. You will know most of Him as you break your bread to the hungry, and so break it to Him, you will know more as you break the bread at the communion table, and so commune with Him. Only remember He is a guest worth pressing, and be sure you do your best humbly but earnestly to detain Him.

IV. I close by telling you of AN ARGUMENT WITH WHICH TO HOLD HIM.

Here it is in the text. “They constrained him, saying, Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.”

My first way of using this text does not commend itself to my judgment, but yet it is necessary. All the commentators and

preachers I have ever met with suppose that these disciples meant by this argument that it was dreary for themselves to be alone, and therefore for their own comfort and protection they begged the stranger to remain. I do not believe it for a moment, still, that would have been a good argument with the tender-hearted Savior, and if you and I cannot attain to anything else, let us use that plea. It is toward evening with many of you. You are *in affliction*, and the shadows thicken, your light has departed, and you are afraid, sorrows come on like the darkness of night, you know not what approaches, you are heavy of heart. Ah, then that is a blessed prayer—

“Fast falls the eventide!
The darkness thickens:
Lord, with me abide.”

You can bear any trouble with Christ. No adversities shall hurt you, no afflictions shall grieve your spirit if He be with you. Pray, therefore, this prayer, and no longer fear as you enter into the cloud.

Or it may be that some of you are falling into *depression of spirit* through the loss of the light of God's countenance, you are not as joyful a Christian as you used to be, the high felicities of your spirit have burned down, and all is dim. Now is the time to say, “Lord, abide with me. If I have no joy, still let me have Yourself.” It is a blessed thing when a believer does not set his affection so much upon the joy of the Lord as upon the Lord of his joy, when he says not only, “Lord, I will rejoice in You while You smile,” but cries with Job, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” Better to have to do with a killing God than to have God away. So, cry, “Lord, if I never get a smile from You, if I am never again cheered and comforted by You, if I

never sing a hymn of gladness, yet still abide with me. Be near, even if I know it not.”

It was a beautiful expression of David, who often asked the Lord to shine upon him, when he said, “In the shadow of your wings will I rejoice.” As much as to say—if I have no light from God’s face, I will be glad to be hidden beneath His wings. Abide with me, then, even if my reason almost fails me, and my darkened soul dreads a yet more tremendous night. Abide with me, O Lord, even should my sorrow seal my eyes in death.

“Abide with me” is a blessed prayer for those believers who are *getting aged*. With them it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. Now should they cry, “Abide with me.” Then will you sweetly go to your chamber and fall into your last, most blessed sleep, and obtain the fulfillment of your prayer that you may be forever with the Lord.

I have used the text in this way because everybody has used it so, but I believe that these disciples meant it in quite another sense. They used the argument to detain Christ because it was evening, *for His sake*, because the night was coming on, and they could not think of His being out in it. They knew how heavy the Eastern dews are, and so they pressed Him with this, “Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.”

Let each one use that argument with our Lord even now—Lord, the world has no entertainment for You, unbelieving hearts give You no shelter, the self-righteous repel You from their doors, the worldly see no beauty in You, carnal hearts refuse You, every house is locked against You, therefore come in and abide with me. Here is lodging for You, come in, You blessed one, and stay with me. If You lack shelter in king’s palaces, abide with me, if there is no room for You in the inn, yet come in hither and find Yourself at home, for I shall count myself greatly honored by receiving You. Therefore, dear Master, abide with me.

How we ought to long to cheer the Blessed One with our love, because He is still so despised and rejected everywhere else. Everywhere else they treat Him ill. O do not let Him be wounded in the house of His friends. If He had fifty houses to go to I might say, “Lord, they can give You better entertainment than lies in my power,” but when it is “toward evening” and no other door is open, Lord come into my poor cot. I will set all that I have before You and be myself Your willing servant. That is the plea.

Another form of the plea is this. “The ages are growing old and dark. What a plea that is for the church to put up now, for the coming of her Lord. O Lord, it is toward evening, the world’s sun is setting, it is nearly nineteen hundred years ago since you ascended, and still the world lies in the wicked one, Lord, come to Your church, come and abide with her, for as the world grows old, good Master, a chill night comes on, and the love of many waxes cold, and there are some that turn aside who once ran well. Dire evils walk abroad in the dark, and blasphemy and rebuke are rife. Good Master, come unto Your church, and dwell in her, and find there Your home.

“And the night of all nights is coming on, even the end of the world. We know not when, but we know we are getting nearer to it every day. Earth’s day is far spent, her day of mercy comes toward its eventide, and the night draws on, therefore, Master, come and abide with us, that we may win the world for you. Come; come that we may convert the heathen to Your cross, and that You may have them for Your inheritance. It is with Your church that You will do this, come, then, and abide with her ministers and her missionaries, and all her living membership, that yet the prophecies may be accomplished and the purpose of the Lord may be fulfilled, and Your reward may be the salvation of Your own.”

Is not that a good missionary text after all, a blessed prayer with which to begin this missionary week—“Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent”? In the Romish church there is a chant which they use from Easter to the day of Ascension, and though I care nothing for liturgies or anything of the sort, yet it is certainly a suggestive canticle. The first line of the chant is,

“Abide with us: Hallelujah.”

And the next is—

“For it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.
Hallelujah.”

With that I close. May we use that argument well, until our Lord shall in very deed abide with us.

1656 SOLACE IN AFFLICTION – PS. 119:89-92

A Sermon Delivered
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness is unto all generations: You have established the earth and it abides. They continue this day according to Your ordinances: for all are Your servants. Unless Your law had been my delights, I should then have perished in my affliction.

— Psalm 119:89-92

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Psalms 142 and 143]

EVEN IN THOSE PSALMS which are not associated with any particular chapter of history, we can often trace out the trail of the writer's experience, and track his soul through its wanderings. His reflections then become vivid with intense reality. The meditation now before us is evidently prompted by some event deeply carved on the writer's memory. "Unless Your law had been my delights, I should *then* have perished in my affliction." We know nothing of the time or circumstance when the heart was terrified, when the nerves were shaken, when the weakness of nature asserted itself. The veil is wisely drawn over the sharp pains or sullen griefs that bowed the sufferer down, and we are simply solaced with a song celebrating his deliverance out of all his troubles and fears. Possibly his affliction was long, but certainly it reached a crisis so perilous that his life *then* trembled in the balance. He was *then* ripe for destruction, ready to have perished. Moreover, it is

noteworthy that whatever his trial may have been, whether it was a sickness or a disaster, or any other manner of adversity, he refers to it as *his own*, and he calls it, “*my affliction*.” It would ill become us, therefore, to pry into the cause or fashion of his grief, or to ask any further question. Quite likely I may be addressing some dear child of God who is vexed with an affliction so personal and so peculiar that he feels it to be “his own,” and would deem it an intrusion for another to interfere. Let us not intrude, for we should only increase the grief by our inquiries. “*My affliction*” is an expression that bears a marked emphasis, and has a tone entirely its own. I do not know whether I am more struck with its pathos or its reticence. At the sound of such words a stranger might well be touched with pity, but a friend, however sympathizing, would shrink from prying into the secrets of a heart that so delicately conceals its own bitterness.

The one and only thing that the Psalmist was eager to tell us was the prescription that soothed his pains and sustained his spirits. On mature reflection he is confident that he would have perished under that affliction if it had not been for certain comfortable and delightful reflections concerning God’s word. You and I may at any time be exposed to the same mental or spiritual depression, through one or other of those manifold sorrows which enter so largely into Christian life. There are plenty of miry places on the way to heaven and so it will be our wisdom to diligently inquire how this good man passed through them. I like to hear how any godly man has been comforted, for it comforts me. I take a deep interest in the simple tale of any humble prisoner whose bonds the Lord has loosed. And I feel it a choice pleasure to chime in with songs of thanksgiving which come from the lips of grateful suppliants whose cries the Lord has heard.

Observe that the Psalmist appeals *to certain facts which he remembered*. “Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness is unto all generations: You have established the earth and it abides,” etc. And then he refers to *certain delights which he experienced* in reviewing these facts, “Unless Your law had been my delights, I should have perished in my affliction.”

I. Here then, we have strong consolation **IN CERTAIN FACTS WHICH HE REMEMBERED**. Fly you to the mountains when the enemy invades the land. Hide in the strongholds of your God.

1. Our first comfort is *the eternal existence of God*, which is implied in the continuance of His faithfulness and power. “The Lord lives” is the plea of souls harassed and haunted by foes without and fears within. Observe, I pray you, that there is nothing casual or accidental in the tone of the Psalmist’s meditation, as if some stray thought had darted a ray of light into the mind of one who was dreary and downcast. His joy is not like a flower that blooms in the desert, or a bird that chirps merrily amidst the frost of winter, but he has abundant and even overflowing cause for joy. His confidence runs on the grand old classic lines which inspiration has hallowed. When Moses was appalled by the frailty of man he uttered his majestic ode to the eternity of God. “Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.” So here, the eternal existence of God is the first fact to which the afflicted saint clings. According to the most eminent scholars the opening sentence should be read—“Forever You are, O Lord; Your word is settled in heaven.” The second verse, as you may notice, is divided into two sentences, and the poetic parallelism requires a like arrangement in this verse, if the poetic rule is carried out. But this would not form two stanzas unless we read the first four words as a distinct sentence—“Forever, O Lord, You are.” Whether this revision is warranted or not does not matter, for,

as I have already said, the fact is implied in the wording of the authorized version. God is. He is forever the same and His years are throughout all generations. This is a very simple truth, who but a madman or a fool ever doubted it? If there is a God, He must be self-existent and eternal. But it is from simplest things that sweetest consequences flow. Bread is simple enough; you do not require some eminent chief of the kitchen to teach you the art of making bread. But see what multitudes of people are fed upon that simple article of food. And so, the simplest truth is the most precious, for it sustains many more than that daintier form of truth, which may be only suitable for men of strong minds or of great experience in the things of God.

In the song of Moses—that song which is linked with the song of the Lamb—we have an apostrophe that language could hardly surpass. “Who is like unto You, O Lord, among the gods (or mighty ones)? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” To what lofty heights of expression did the holy prophets often rise in proclaiming the grandeur of the Lord’s being, the magnitude of His works, the sovereignty of His will, and the faithfulness of His promises to His people! And yet the wealth of imagery that Isaiah or Ezekiel could call up, or the melting tones that Jeremiah could utter, can but faintly display the excellence of Him that fills all in all. They rehearse His praise to whom alone all worship is due, in words that swell and sound forth like the music of the spheres, or they assail the heathen idolatry which offered its incense to engraved images, or they expose the heartless treachery that withheld homage from the true God, or they denounce the unbelief which limited the Holy One of Israel, by distrusting His words. In any of these cases, if we lend them our ears, they succeed in elevating our hearts from the groveling thoughts of our fleeting life to the infinite perfection of Jehovah’s essential deity, of whom (to accommodate the idea of His everlasting existence

to our tiny computations) we are told “that one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” My brethren, we are compassed about with God on every side. In Him we live, and move, and have our being. His self-existent might is our never-failing mercy. Observe, I pray you, that this simple truth is the most sublime fact which the mind of a rational creature can aspire to lay hold of. God lives—lives as God. Get a grip of this vital reality, and it will send a glow of health through every faculty of your soul. “Believe in the Lord your God; so shall you be established: believe His prophets; so shall you prosper.” But unless God is in all your thoughts you cannot be a godly man.

Nothing happens to the Lord by chance. What can threaten His existence, thwart His purpose, weaken His power, dim the clearness of His eye, diminish the tenderness of His heart, or distract the wisdom of His judgment? “You are the same, and of Your years there is no end.” Then remember, child of God, you are a sheep that can never lose its shepherd. You are a child that can never lose its Father. “I will not leave you orphans,” said Jesus, and therein He did reveal the Eternal Father’s heart. In direst straits we still have a Father in heaven. When a widow who had long been inconsolable, sat moaning for the loss of her husband, her little child plucked her by her gown, and said, “Mother, is God dead?” That question served to rebuke the mother’s fretfulness, and to remind her that she was not without a Guardian and Friend. “Your Maker is your husband; the Lord of Hosts is His name.” It opened up to her a well of refreshment, which, like Hagar in the wilderness, she had not before been able to see. Listen, child of God, you can lose your goods, but you cannot lose your God. Like Jonah, you can see your gourd withered, but your God remains. You may lose your land, but not your Lord, your savings, but not your Savior. Even if it came to the worst, and you were left

awhile, as one forsaken of God Himself, yet still you would not lose Him, for, like the Lord Jesus on the cross, you would still call Him, “My God, my God.” “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul—a portion that never can be alienated, upon which there is the entail of an irreversible decree—that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us, might have strong consolation. He lives. He reigns. This God is our God, and He shall be our guide even unto death.

Yes, it is a simple fact that *God is*, but it is a fact that may often recur to us with singular freshness. I met an eminent servant of God one day in the street, a man whose name, were I to mention it, you would all honor. He was in a rather gloomy and desponding mood that morning, and in the course of our conversation he told me that he believed the powers of evil in this country would get the upper hand, that Christianity would be almost stamped out, he feared, partly by Romanism, and partly by infidelity. And that in all probability I should live to see the streets of London run with blood, while anarchy would riot as it did in the first French Revolution. He went on at such a rate that I felt bound to reprove him. So I told him that I was not easily scared by such evil prognostications, for I was persuaded that God was not dead.

This is our firm rock of hope, the reins of government are in the hands of the living God, and the devil cannot frustrate His decrees, nor can events baffle His will. When Herod and Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together against the holy child Jesus whom the Lord had anointed, how little could they effect! They had it all their own way, or, at least, they thought they had. How much did they really accomplish with their willful counsels and their wicked hands? Hear it distinctly. They (these emissaries of Satan) did whatever God’s hand and God’s counsel determined

before to be done. And thus it will always be. The adversaries of the Lord are exceedingly fierce, but you and I who believe in God can afford to smile at their folly. If it must be so, let the powers of darkness have all the vantage ground they seek, and they will reap all the greater defeat. “He that sits in the heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall have them in derision. Yet have I set My king upon My holy hill of Zion.” The church, they tell us, is in danger. That depends upon whose church it is. But if it is the church of our Lord Jesus Christ, the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. Let us in this, then, be joyous and confident. If Luther could sing when the battle had but just begun—while yet the demon of the seven hills had temporal sway, why should you and I be hanging our harps on the willows, now that the fight has made the dragon bleed? Come let us sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously. The horse and his rider He has thrown into the sea. And as for these Amalekites that meet us on the road, and would arrest our progress, let us, like Jehoshaphat, appoint singers unto the Lord to go before our army and meet them with hallelujahs. Let us sing—Arise, O God, and make Your enemies flee before You like chaff before the wind. Yes, let them be as the fat of rams burnt upon the altar, for You, Lord, are King, and You shall reign forever and ever. This is a flowing well of comfort.

2. Closely allied to the fact of God's eternal being is this other fact of *the immutability of His word*. “Your word is settled in heaven.” The truth of the proposition will occur to you as simple and obvious. “Thus says the Lord, the heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool.” His word is settled in heaven and issued from heaven, the seat of His government, and it cannot be altered on earth, this distant colony of His empire. We refer to God's word, therefore, in grievous difficulties with great confidence, because we know that every statement it contains is reliable. God's word can never change.

It is established. Some persons have no settled residence, they are always moving to and fro, and restless, finding no anchorage. But God's word is not fixed on earth where things are always on the move, but it is settled in heaven among the infinities and eternities that change not. "Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven."

The design and purpose of God are fixed, not fickle. He knows what He intends. You and I often begin with a design from which we are bound to deviate as we see something that would be better, or as we see that our better thing is not attainable, and we are obliged to be content with something inferior. But in God's case there can be no defect of judgment which would require amendment, and there can be no defect of power which would drive Him from His first determination. God has a plan, depend upon it. It is an insult to the supreme intellect if we supposed that He worked at random, without plan or method. To some of us it is a truth which we never doubt, that God has one boundless purpose which embraces all things, both things which He permits and things which He ordains. Without for a moment denying the freedom of the human will, we still believe that the supreme wisdom foresees also the curious twisting of the human will, and overrules all for His own ends. God knows and numbers all the inclinations and devices of men, and His plan in its mighty sweep takes them all into account. From that plan He never swerves. What He has resolved to do He will do. The settled purpose of His heart shall stand forever sure. Of what use could the opposition of angels or of men be when Omnipotence asserts its supremacy?

As you walk down your garden on an autumn morning the spiders have spun their webs across the path, but you scarcely know it, for as you move along the threads vanish before you. So is it with every scheme, however skillfully contrived, that would arrest the fulfillment of the Divine purpose. The will of

God must be done. Without the semblance of effort He molds all events into His chosen form. In the sphere of mind as well as in that of matter, His dominion is absolute. One man cannot *immediately* operate on the will of another man so as to change its course, although *intermediately* he may propound reasons which, by their effect on the understanding, may completely alter the inclination of His fellow creature. But this is a true Proverb—"The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turns it wherever He wills." God can bend the thoughts of men as easily as we can lay on the pipes, and turn the water into any cistern we choose.

His purpose is settled forever in heaven, so, too, are *His covenant and His plan*. Brothers and sisters, I could imagine God changing His mode of procedure, but I could not imagine His changing His covenant. He has entered into covenant with Christ on our behalf. The sacrifice that makes it valid has been slain, and now the covenant is ordered in all things and sure. Every jot and tittle of it is signed and sealed and ratified by the death and the resurrection of our glorious Surety and blessed Representative. From that covenant God will never turn aside. The covenant of works we broke, but God kept it, for He did what He said He would do. The covenant of grace we cannot break, for it is made with another on our behalf, who has already fulfilled it, so that the covenant of grace stands now towards the saints without an, "if" or "but" or "perhaps," and consists simply in unconditional promises of "I will," and "you shall." Read that covenant for yourselves and see. Whether you choose to take the copy of it in Ezekiel, or the copy of it presented by the apostle in the Epistle to the Hebrews, there it stands, a covenant without conditions, enduring forever never to be changed. Oh, how I rejoice in the sure mercies of David! "This is as the waters of Noah unto Me," says the Lord, "for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go

over the earth, so have I sworn that I will not be angry with you, or rebuke you.” Now, blessed be His name, the covenant is settled in heaven.

Then there is another matter which is settled, namely, *God’s promise and the power to carry it out*. I spoke of the promise being settled, because it is virtually a constituent element of the covenant, but now I mean that gospel promise which has been proclaimed to the sons of men. “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved”—that shall stand good throughout all generations. “He that believes in Him has everlasting life”—that shall always be true. “Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out”—that shall never alter till the day of doom. God will not reverse the thing that has gone forth out of His lips. It was proclaimed by Christ Himself. It was testified by His apostles. It was ratified by the descent of the Holy Spirit. The promises of the gospel are settled in heaven; therefore the preaching of the gospel is full of power among the sons of men. Go and preach it, dear brethren. Go and tell it, dear sisters. Never be afraid that you will make a mistake if you proclaim free grace and dying love. God has not spoken in secret in a dark place of the earth. The salvation of souls shall be the evidence of the efficacy of the gospel till every blood-bought one is brought by its power to Jesus’ feet. There is no change in the charge that is committed to our keeping, “Your word is settled in heaven.”

Moreover, *the doctrine of the gospel* as well as the promise of the gospel *is settled in heaven*. I do not know where I shall drift if I once leave the old channel to wind about among sandbanks. Certain of my brethren delight to sail down a river which has neither buoys nor fixed lights, but plenty of evershifting sands. They do not steer according to any chart, but according to their own heaving of the lead from time to time, and very heavy lead it is to heave too. They say that they are thinking out their

doctrines. I would be greatly sorry to have to think out the road to heaven without the guiding star of heaven's grace or the map of the word. Not gospel preachers but gospel makers these men aspire to be. And their message comes forth, not as the gospel of the grace of God, but as the gospel of the imagination of men, a gospel concocted in their own kitchen, not taught them by the Holy Spirit. It is the reverse of being "settled in heaven," it is not even settled in the mind of its inventor.

I pity the hearers as well as the preachers of a precarious gospel. That which I preached to you in the beginning of my ministry I shall preach to you, by God's grace, till this tongue shall be silent in the grave. I know the doctrines better, but I know no better doctrines. There are certain things indelibly impressed on my mind, of a surety fixed, definite, true, and beyond doubt. As to ideas that are dubious, concerning which we need to be diffident—I leave my brethren to discuss them. Sentiments fluctuate so constantly in this 19th century that I suppose we shall soon require barometers to show us the variations of doctrine as well as the prospects of the weather. We shall have to consult quarterly reviews, to see what style of religious thought is predominant, and then we shall have to accommodate our sermons to the dictum of the last wise man that has chosen to make a special fool of himself. As for myself, I shall continue to be unfashionable and abide where I am. "Stick in the mud," says somebody. "Standing on the Rock," say I. No, if you will—grown to the Rock—immovable, not to be turned aside. If this gospel is a lie, I grieve that I ever preached it, and I will never preach it again. If it is true, truth is not a thing of almanacs and quarterlies. If true in the year "*two*" it is as true in the year "*1882*." And if it is not true today, it never was and never will be true, for truth does not come and go, and be and cease to be.

Fall you back, O simple hearts, upon this blessed fact—God’s word is “settled in heaven.” It cannot be settled at Oxford, or settled at Cambridge, or at any other university, but it is settled in heaven. Go to heaven’s book, and read heaven’s word under the teaching of heaven’s own Spirit, and you shall go from strength to strength in the knowledge, not of what *may be* true, but of what *is* true, having the revelation of God to confirm it—an authority from which there can be no appeal.

3. The third thing is *the faithfulness of the fulfillment of that word*. “Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness is unto all generations.” Those men who have trusted God’s word in any generation have always found it true. In apostolic times, or further back than that, in David’s age, in the era of Moses, in the time of Abraham, in the days of Noah, in the life of Abel, whoever has trusted in God has found that He has heard prayer, that He has been the rewarder of all them that diligently seek Him. The covenant, as I have already said, does not change, and the truth does not change, and though the generations greatly differ in the judgment of men, I greatly question whether God thinks them different. One generation is as like another, as successive waves of the sea. We think we grow much wiser, but it is not a very strong proof that we are wiser because we think we are so. I very much question all this fiddle-faddle about the progress of the 19th century. True, we rush over the country by steam instead of traveling by broad-wheeled wagons, and we get smashed up all the more readily. We now go all round the world to buy a bit of bread, we used to grow it in our own fields, and it was just as good then as it is now that it comes from afar. There were good people then, there are good people now.

I will not decry whatever progress has been made in machinery and the arts, and so on. I thank God for it all, but about the improvement in ourselves—that is the point. I

imagine that we bear a striking resemblance to our fathers. When I read the story of the children of Israel in the wilderness, I think I see their sins and their follies, their murmurs and complaints repeated in our own lives. But whether or not the race has changed, there has been no change in God's dealings with the race. Whenever a believer has rested in Him, He has fulfilled His word to that believer to the letter. This has always been the rule of the kingdom—"According to your faith, so is it unto you." Were I to enlarge upon all the vicissitudes through which God's servants have passed, we should have to come to the one conclusion, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all." That is so today, as it was thousands of years ago.

O beloved, this is the mercy—that God is faithful still. When I used to hear my grandfather tell of the faithfulness of God to him, my young heart was encouraged to trust in God. When I have heard my father tell of the faithfulness of God to him, I have been strengthened in my confidence in my father's God. But I can tell the same tale myself, and perhaps I can record more instances than they of God's goodness to those that put their trust in Him. It will be the same with our children and with our children's children. O tried brothers and sisters, the Lord will be faithful to you as He has been to me. The Lord will not fail you. Therefore be not discouraged. As your days, so shall your strength be. Underneath you are the everlasting arms. You shall conquer, however hot, the fight may become. Only stay yourself upon the Lord and wait patiently for Him. Fret not yourself in anything to do evil, for you shall be delivered, and God shall be glorified in you.

4. But I must pass on to the next fact worth considering, and that is *the perpetuity of the word in nature*. To this the Psalmist alludes in the following words, "You have established the earth, and it abides. They continue this day according to Your

ordinances, for all are Your servants.” By the word of God were the heavens made, and it is by His word that all things consist. We talk of the force of gravitation, and the laws of nature, but in very deed the one force in nature is that God spoke. The word of the Lord is the power by which all things hold together and remain in their places.

Look at the earth. We talk of the pillars of it—the columns upon which it leans, but what does it rest upon? Our modern science does not weaken the point of the text, it rather strengthens it. The earth rests upon nothing. There it is floating in space, and yet it has never drifted from its place or turned aside from its proper orbit. There are little quivers within its own bosom, but it does not rush away from the place where God ordained it to be. It continues its course around the sun with immutable fidelity. This world is rather larger than you are, and requires more power to keep it in its place than is requisite to keep you in your place. Yet there it is. Shall not the Lord hold up His servant and keep him from wandering? All the machinery in the world could not turn the globe on its axis or move it in its orbit. I suppose that no angelic force would be adequate to bring about such results as God accomplishes simply by His will. He establishes the world and it abides. Let us be confident then. Whenever God means to break His word and change His ordinances we may expect to find this earth go steaming into the sun, or else it will rush far off into space, nobody knows where. But while it keeps its place, what have you and I to worry about? Is it not the sign that the Lord will keep us also? Has He kept the stars which are the major? Shall He not much more keep us who are the minor? What are we but small specks, grains of dust, things scarcely to be seen, and yet we talk about the great power of God that we shall need to keep us in our place. Let us cease from doubt as we see this

huge world kept like a sapphire in its golden setting by the divine hand.

Nor, brethren, is it this world alone, vast though it may seem to us, yet a little planet amidst the larger spheres. The Lord upholds all worlds comprehended in one vast system. “They continue this day according to Your ordinances.” Every star maintains its place. “One sun by day, by night ten thousand shine,” yet these constellations, and all other creations of God’s hand, observe each one the ordinance of heaven. God does not swerve from His own statutes, nor does He suffer the shining hosts to break their ranks. They may not rush about in wild confusion; they are the sentinels of heaven. He calls them all by name, as He musters and marshals their serried ranks. Are they not all His servants, waiting at His feet as maidens attend their mistress? They all do His bidding. Ought not this cheer our hearts and inspire us with courage? If *the heavenly bodies*—as we are known to call those inanimate creatures of the Most High—are upheld by His power and disposed of by His wisdom, why should we discredit the Omnipotence which preserves our souls, or the Omniscience which orders our steps? If yon unpillared arch stands without buttress, cannot my faith rest on the promise, though no means of support are visible?

Those mighty orbs to which we have been referring are under law, and subject to the divine statutes, alike in respect to the motions they perform and to the influence they produce. All the creatures obey their Maker except man. There is no rebellion to our knowledge anywhere in the universe except among fallen angels and fickle mortals like ourselves. What, then, am I troubled about? Opposing forces cannot injure me. If God wills, He can send a squadron of angels to help me. He can bid the stars in their courses fight for me if it is necessary. All are His servants. The perpetuity of the laws of nature is a proof of the continuance of the word of God. Strengthen your

confidence as to things not seen by the steadfastness of the things that are seen—

“His very word of grace is strong
As that which built the skies;
The voice that rolls the stars along
Speaks all the promises.”

5. There is one other fact which I will only touch upon, *the perpetuity of the word in experience*. “Unless,” said the Psalmist, “Your law had been my delights, I should then have perished in my affliction.” We know by experience what he means. The trouble is a thing of the past, but the trembling is still present to our memory. We were mercifully delivered when we might have been utterly destroyed. My brethren, that same word which has made the earth to keep its place, has up to now, been sufficient to make you keep your place. Some of you have passed through deep waters, and yet you have not been drowned. I have sympathy with young people when they doubt, because they have not seen the mighty works of which their fathers have told them, but if you have been sustained for 40 years in the wilderness, you ought to know the faithfulness of God, and I am ashamed of you when you get disheartened, and discourage your brethren. Most of all, I am ashamed of myself whenever I fall into despondency. Admiral Drake had been round the world. He had survived all sorts of storms and battles. One day, when coming up the Thames, he was caught in such an ugly wind that he was likely to be wrecked, and the admiral cried, “No, no, I have been round the world, and I do not intend to be drowned in a ditch.” I want you to be animated by the same courage, for the Lord will not leave you. Surely He who has preserved you in all your previous distresses will not desert you in your present adversities. If you had not taken

delight in God's word you would long ago have perished in your affliction. Look back upon the past, then, and see that God has been sufficient for you up till now. What reason have you for the suspicion that He will not befriend you even to the end?

II. Having thus drawn your attention to the facts that the Psalmist recounts, I pass on, in the second place, to speak of **THE DELIGHTS WHICH HE EXPERIENCED IN THE TIME OF HIS TROUBLE.**

“Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward,” said one of Job's comforters, though I fear Job got little enough of comfort out of that sage reflection. Those troubles, however, that are common to men are often the occasion of uncommon anguish to persons of sensitive nature. Some men and women receive a shock from which they never recover, they gradually droop and languish, health and happiness alike failing them. It is in such seasons of acute distress, when this world has no soothing to offer, that God's word can minister infinite delights to soothe the distractions and heal the sorrows of the heart. These psalms—most of them written by David, and the rest written by disciples of the David school—compass almost every conceivable form of adversity that our poor suffering humanity is exposed. And there is another thing which I am sure you will find it sweet to muse upon. It is this—in all cases the sigh was turned into a song before it was admitted into the sacred calendar. This is a law of the kingdom of heaven over which I linger with unspeakable delight. In fact, I can take a survey of your troubles, as well as of my own, with much composure when I perceive that they are all capable of being turned into joy.

Our sympathies are continually stirred by the *bereavements* one and another of us are called to suffer. The ties of kindred and friendship are being broken all around. Each day has its

obituary. This goes on from generation to generation. But the sharp pang of losing those we love is in no wise lightened by the fact that it is so general. Some of us today live in dread; others have drawn down the blinds. He is gone on whom you leaned for succor. She has been snatched from your side, of whom you could say that none upon earth excelled her. Your nurslings, the flowers that bloomed around your hearth, have faded. I hear your desolate moan, but there is music not far off. All creatures are shadows, yet there is substance. At length you turn to these Scriptures, and as you read, “The Lord lives; and blessed be my Rock; and exalted be the God of the rock of my salvation,” your soul revives. You quit the treacherous sea and reach the solid rock, when you repeat the words, “Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.” Alas, dear mourner, your thoughts have wandered, like the dove from out the ark, over the watery waste, but now again Noah’s hand encloses you. There you have calm and peaceful rest. Here is the pillow on which your aching head can lie at ease, “You are the same; of Your years there is no end.” Such delights can sustain a sinking soul.

David was oftentimes in such a condition that *everything seemed shifting and inconstant*. Nothing about him was fixed. Those whom he had most trusted seemed to be his worst enemies. His fortunes changed. He was driven from the home of his father and from the palace of the king, to wander in the wilderness and lodge in caves of the earth. And he became distrustful at times of his own destiny, for his heart was heavy, whereas once he had been the gladdest of the sons of men. Oh then, this was his delight— he fell back upon the eternal settlements. “Your word is settled,” said he. “I have no settlement. I have to go off to Gath to try and find a shelter there, but every place seems to cast me out. The men of Keilah will deliver me up. I am hunted and harried by Saul. Nothing is

settled for me, but O, my God, Your word is settled.” Now peace comes like a river to his spirit. His delights are in the word and his heart is full of holy glee.

So, too, sometimes he felt that *his own faith failed him*, and that is a desperate failure. When your vision is obscured, and you walk in darkness, you are sorely molested by doubts and haunted with fears. You can believe nothing; you can hardly grip at anything that others believe in, this is terrible. Your own frailty, your own unfaithfulness to God, your own waywardness, your own fickleness disquiets you with feverish dreams, and wastes every particle of your strength. Then what a grand comfort it is to stand upon the divine faithfulness—“Your faithfulness, O God, is unto all generations. You have not changed.” Oh, do try, dear troubled ones, and may God the Holy Spirit help you in the trying, to get a hold of this delightful truth, and while you mourn your own unfaithfulness, rejoice in the faithfulness of God and the immutability of His covenant. David’s Bible was of much smaller compass than ours, but there was one passage in it which I dare say he often read and deeply pondered. It was that which tells us how, when Abraham was lonely and desponding, “The Lord brought him forth abroad, and said, ‘Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if you are able to number them.’” How often have those ordinances of heaven, sent beams of light into the heart of the spiritual mariner while he has been heaving to and fro on the troubled sea of life. So did David, look right up to the deep serene of heaven and rest in God, the stable and abiding.

Last of all, when none were his servants and *all helpers failed him*—when he was alone and none would do him homage, he found comfort in this thought—that all are God’s servants, that all the powers of nature wait upon the princes of the blood royal, and do homage to the children of the King of kings. You are not poor, your father is rich. You are not deserted, God is

with you. You are not without helpers; the angels are bid to keep watch and guard about you. Oh, that I could touch the mourner's downcast eyes and let him see the mountain full of horses of fire and chariots of fire round about Elisha. Oh, that I could touch the heart of some of God's desponding servants, and make them see how God is working for them even now, and how surely they shall be helped. Perhaps you remember the story of a conversation between the burgomaster in Hamburg and holy Mr. Oncken when he first began to preach. The burgomaster said to him, "Do you see that little finger, Sir? While I can move that little finger, I will put the Baptists down." Mr. Oncken said, "With all respect to your little finger, Mr. Burgomaster, I would ask you another question. Do you see that great arm?" "No, I do not see it." "Just so," said Mr. Oncken, "but I do, and while that great arm moves, you cannot put us down, and if it comes to a conflict between your little finger and that great arm, I know how it will end." It was my great joy to see the burgomaster sitting in the Baptist chapel at Hamburg, among the audience that listened to my sermon at the opening of the new chapel. The little finger had willingly given up its opposition, and the great arm was made bare among us. Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength. God bring us all to that, both saint and sinner, for Christ's sake. Amen.

1657 MY HOURLY PRAYER – PS. 119:117

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Evening, February 26, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

Hold you me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect
unto your statutes continually. — Psalm 119:117

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Psalm 119:113-128]

“HOLD YOU ME UP.” This is no novelty as a prayer, we have met with it many a time. Another form of it lies hard by. Look at the verse immediately before the text, and see it there in another shape. “Uphold me.” I know of no difference in the two prayers, “Uphold me” and “Hold me up,” they are two notes from the same bell, and they teach us that the Psalmist’s mind was full of the petition, for he was conscious of his need of this upholding—this holding up.

We use not vain repetitions as the heathen do, and hence when we have to express the same idea it is natural to the living child of God to couch it in as fresh words as he can, and though it be the same note, yet he changes it somewhat, and first cries, “Uphold me,” and then, “Hold me up.” Of course I am now preaching only from the English text when I note these changes of expression, and I am rather giving illustrations than teaching by authority. Yet this is of authority—that we have need continually to cry for upholding grace.

You notice that in the first prayer, “Uphold me,” it is for very life that he entreats for this upholding. “Uphold me according unto your word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope.” He feels that unless fresh grace shall flow into his soul his spiritual life must utterly fail. Do not forget this, let it give weight to your pleadings. But in the second of the two verses—the one which makes our text—he looks for more than life as the result of upholding, he looks for safety, a life of unsullied holiness and consequent restfulness and security. “Hold you me up, and I shall be safe, and I will have respect unto your statutes continually.” Both verses show you the importance of the prayer, and both together will, I hope, enlist your earnest attention to what I may have to say upon it.

It is a very sweet remark that every prayer is an inverted promise. That is to say, God promises us such a blessing, and therefore we pray for it, or, if you please, if God teaches us to pray for any good thing, we may gather by implication the assurance that He means to give it. If you feel in your heart a God-inspired desire to ask a certain favor it is because God intends to bestow it upon you.

A prayer is the shadow of a coming blessing. Therefore do we pray, because the blessing is coming. It is said that prayer cannot alter the purpose of God. Of course it cannot. It does not alter it, but indicates it, and since people are moved to pray this way or that way by the Spirit of God, it is because the Spirit knows the mind of God, and His movement to pray is a revelation of the mind of God to the praying one.

Believing supplication is God writing His desires upon the hearts of His own children, with the intent to fulfill them. Is it not written, “Delight yourself also in the LORD, and he shall give you the desires of your heart”? It is not that God will give the desires of His heart to every man. No, but to that man whose heart is in such sympathy with God that he delights in

God, and consequently desires what God desires. Then, when our heart runs side by side with the mind of God, our prayer is parallel with His purpose, and consequently it is done unto us according to our desire.

Now, I conceive that it is always according to God's mind to hold His servants up. He delights not in their slips or falls—to suppose such a thing were blasphemous. “The steps of a good man are ordered of the LORD.” God is pleased with the steadfastness of His chosen, He smiles upon the firmness of their standing. God would not have one of His people even dash his foot against a stone, and hence He sets the angels to guard them. If they do trip in their walk He is quick to restore them, for He cannot endure that they should lie in the mire. His joy is that we walk with Him in constant holiness, and He is ready to grant us this boon.

This prayer shows in David a great sense of the need of being upheld, a strong conviction that God could uphold Him, and an expectation and hope that He would surely do so in answer to his prayer. May we appropriate this prayer with somewhat of David's feeling, deeply conscious of utter helplessness, fully believing that the omnipotent grace of God can meet that helplessness, and confident that He will hear our cry and answer us and uphold us to the end. Let us believe that our heavenly Father will keep us from falling, but let us be well assured that apart from His keeping our soul will fall, and great will be the fall thereof.

First, I shall speak of *God's holding us up*, and then of the *two blessings that come out of it*, namely, safety and watchfulness. “I shall be safe,” and “I shall have respect unto your statutes continually.”

I. First, then, **UPHOLDING**—God's holding us up. It implies a danger, and that danger takes many forms.

The true description of a believing man's life is that he walks in his uprightness. The figure is not hard to understand. "God made man upright, though he has sought out many inventions." The very form and figure of man's body teach us that we are not made to go on "all fours," gazing at the earth from where we sprang, but erect upon our feet, looking upward to the heaven towards which we tend by God's rich grace. You know what is meant by an upright man, a man who does not lean this way or that, and who is not biased or inclined to that which is wrong.

The upright column is the only one which can stand alone, and he who is upright is independent, taking his stand, maintaining his place without a buttress to keep him in it. A very pillar of the earth is such a man. He may say, like David, "The earth is dissolved: I bear up the pillars thereof." So I have seen amid vast masses of surrounding ruin a goodly pillar lift its capital aloft as if it laughed at destruction. There is something bright and cheering about the thought of the believer being an upright man, but the danger is that he may not continue upright. Columns, slowly undermined, lean to this side or that, and their fall is near. Unseen earthworms sink the hidden bases of pillars and cast them down, and secret vices have thus brought down many a noble character.

A Christian man is a pilgrim, and he makes progress in his march to glory so long as he walks uprightly. But will he keep his uprightness? No, he is certain not to keep upright unless he be upheld, for *the way is slippery*. Ah, how slippery do some find it! It is as a hill of ice, and at some points it is more treacherous than usual. Those who have ever gone over the Grimsel Pass will remember that on one side of it, in descending, there is a place they call, "Hell Place," because the road is narrow and shelving, and the precipice on that side is exceedingly deep, while the path is singularly smooth. Drips of rain water, and

sometimes considerable runnels, flow over the red rock, and keep it polished as the floor of a royal salon, and though they chip out grips across the road that there may be a foothold, yet most travelers find it best to leave their mules and tread with timid footsteps over the slippery way. I have a lively recollection of that marble floor, I think they called it porphyry, but it had no charms for me.

Most of us have had a “Hell Place” in our journey to heaven. You remember Joseph’s slippery way, and how God upheld him, else he had fallen, never to rise. David had the like, and his fall was grievous. I say that there is scarce a man who has not had some glassy bit of road where, at the best, his feet had almost gone, his steps had well-nigh slipped, and he had been down on his face if almighty grace had not interposed.

Nor is the best part of the road without its dangers. Believe me no foot of the way is safe to the careless. I have noticed that more men sin without temptation than with it, and that the heaviest falls occur upon perfectly level road where there does not seem to be a stone to catch the foot. Oh, take heed! Take heed! for there is not one point in the journey, from the setting out at the wicket gate even till you reach the river’s brink, which has not dangers in it, and the prayer is always in season, “Hold you me up!”

But that is not all. It is *our feet* that *make the danger* as well as the way. A strong, well-footed man can traverse the precipitous mountain side and never think of a slip. Have you not seen the mountaineer go tripping up the rocks with a heavy load upon him, as firmly-footed as if he had been climbing the steps of the Royal Exchange? Have you not seen him come leaping down again with his alpenstock, where you could not have trodden for a minute? It seemed as if scarce a rabbit or a chamois could have found a pathway, and yet the strong, sure-

footed man has almost danced down beneath his burden. How often I have envied the Alpine peasant those legs and feet.

It is much the same in spiritual things. Strong men stand on their high places, and leap from crag to crag, but as for us, we are not strong or sure-footed. Alas! we have feeble knees, and hands that hang down, and often we are as weak as water. We are children whose tottering footsteps are not as yet familiar with running or climbing. It is as much as we can do to stand when leaning on the Beloved, but to stand upright upon a rough road has not yet come to such feebleness as ours. I speak not of you all, but of far too many. The most of us are poor puny things. Ah! if you know yourself, you will not think that you can stand. It will rather be a wonder to you that you have not already fallen, and when you see others slip, your heart will be in your mouth, for you will say, “I next—I next, unless the grace of God prevent.” So, what with the way and our feet, we need to pray, “Hold you me up!”

But that is not all, for there are *cunning foes that seek to trip us up*. They lay snares for us, they dig pits, they cast their nets across the way. Perhaps some of you are happily free from tempters in your own households, and possibly some are free from distinct temptation from the world. I congratulate you, but very few of us are in that condition. Our foes compass us about like bees. Some threaten, others flatter. A few would bribe us, more would bully us. The bad would deceive, for they put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter, and the best of men, if you follow them too closely, may mislead you. Trust you not in any brother, neither lay hands upon any human guide.

There is One that can conduct you safely, but if you do not follow *Him* you will soon slip with your feet. Many watch for our halting, and if they could find us tripping they would report it with glee to all the sons of Belial. Therefore have we good need to say, “Hold you me up.” Especially is there such need

to those of you who work in shops where ungodliness is in the ascendant so that religion is held in ridicule. Great need is there in the cases of children of ungodly parents with a father who will, if he can find you doing a little amiss, make a great deal of it. Equal necessity is there to you young men who meet with conceited fops who talk philosophy and rail at our old-fashioned faith. You should pray, “Lord, hold you me up, and I shall be safe.”

Nor is this all, though it is quite enough, for sometimes, dear friends, the difficulty of keeping our balance is not caused by the way itself, but by *the height to which God may elevate us*. There are brethren whose position is high, whose brain might long ago have reeled had not infinite mercy held them up. I know those who have not a tenth of their popularity or a hundredth part of their influence, who nevertheless give themselves mighty airs. These lofty-minded gentlemen are in the greatest danger. Let me speak of these grandees, with all due reverence let me take them at their own value for once, though I should be sorry to be forced to complete the purchase.

My dear friend, when you are getting on in the world and prospering, something whispers, “You are a clever fellow,” and when you have won respect by your talent, then again a voice sweetly sings, “You are a highly superior person.” At such times you are in serious peril. It happens to most of us at times to have done so well as to have won the approbation of our little circle, and then the temptation is quite great enough—though it comes not from thousands, or even from hundreds, but from half-dozens—for us to feel that we are somebody. Then the brain grows dizzy, and the danger is great. Anything which leads to self-esteem leads to the utmost jeopardy. If you have a lowly opinion of yourself, I congratulate you, for this is a main element of safety.

The prayer is all the more needful for one other reason, namely, that *the most of people do not keep upright*. Go forth into the world tomorrow, and see how men are acting. Borrow the lantern of Diogenes, and try if you can to find an honest man. You will succeed, but when you have done so, take security for his keeping so. On the exchange, in the market, almost everywhere, the bulk of men are not upright, they are down on all fours. There is a great gold scramble, and they are clutching at it with all their might. Get money. Get money. Is not that the world's own favorite teaching—get it honestly if you can, but, if you cannot get it in that way, get it how you can. Puff, lie, cheat, do anything, only make a fortune. He is the cleverest fellow who can grab the most gold. That is the picture of the business world—a nursery floor of grown-up children scrambling on all fours.

But you say—they do not lie. No, no, only white lies. No, they do not cheat, only it is “the custom of the trade,” you know. “Now, do not talk,” they say to me, “what do you know about it?” More than you think, perhaps, for lookers-on see more than players. “But, sir, business is business.” I know it is, and business has no business to be such business as it often is. Woe to the man whose business will destroy his soul. Woe, double woe to the man whose business destroys the bodies and souls of drunkards! Woe three times over to the wretch who fattens on the iniquities of his fellow men, and gets rich by their damnation, and yet pretends to religion!

But I am wandering; it is because so many people lean this way, or that way, or go altogether on all fours, that it is not the easiest thing in this world for a man to stand bolt upright. He ought to say, “If the world's fate hung on a lie, and I by speaking the lie could save it, I would speak the truth.” If our life depended upon doing what God would not approve, we ought rather to die than sin. Such should be the resolve of the

believer, and he should ask for grace to carry it out. Lord, hold You me up: keep me upright. Whatever happens, do not let me be any other than an upright, downright, perpendicular man, knowing the right thing, speaking the right thing, doing the right thing, by Your grace, even to the end.

But you see the danger, the text suggests it to me. To my ear there is a sharp sound in it. It is almost a cry of sudden alarm. It is as if one felt himself falling, and cried aloud, "Hold me up." The deep descent yawns before him, the earth glides from under him, he cannot regain his footing, and piteously he implores, "Hold you me up." It has come to this pass, that there is an end of the man unless a power beyond his own shall uphold him. O Lord, see you to it.

Now, how does God keep His people upright? He has many ways of doing it, and hence you may pray very hopefully. He can preserve you by angels, "They shall bear you up in their hands, lest at any time you dash your foot against a stone." How many stones you and I might have dashed our feet against if it had not been that we have received mysterious intimations which have put us on our guard. Often and often have I been inwardly admonished, and so preserved from evil. We never knew where it came from, but perhaps the Lord sent the singular intimation by an angel, whose noiseless wings came and went, and we knew not of the messenger though we felt the message. God works mightily this way with many who are obedient to His will.

At other times God holds up His people by the ministry of the word. I have often been told that when you have come in here, I, not knowing anything of your case, have nevertheless spoken to it exactly, and you have had the admonition, or the encouragement, and direction, which you needed at this point and that. To many of you my voice has been as the oracle of God, and that in the verse of a hymn, or in the chapter chosen,

or in a pointed remark in the sermon. Is it not so? Could not many of you bear testimony to it? God's word, wherever it is faithfully spoken, is a wall of fire round about God's people. It protects them from lurking foes of whose existence they were not aware. A gracious promise supplies them with just that stimulus which they need in the hour of fainting, or a stern rebuke acts as the restraint which they require in the moment of temptation.

And have you not found it so, too, by the reading of the word in your own homes? The promise or the precept has come in exactly to fit your case, and you have heard from the Scriptures a voice that said, "This is the way: walk you in it," and you have also been gently made willing to walk in it, and so you have been kept in your integrity. Were professors more familiar with their Bibles they would be less in danger from the common evils of the times. Oh that the Holy Spirit may give us all a deeper love for the word, that so we may be upheld that no iniquity may have dominion over us.

Often God keeps His people upright, and holds them firmly, by chastisement. When roughly smitten you feel as though you were a child falling over a precipice, half dazed by terror, and think that your father has taken hold of you, and by severely shaking you, has awakened you and saved you. I have seen a driver give a horse a flip because he was getting sleepy and had stumbled, that cut woke up the creature, and he went with a sure foot afterwards.

The Lord has often saved us from a sad fall by a sharp chastisement. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept your word." At times the chastisement has been rather of the spirit than of anything outward. All things have gone well externally, but you have been depressed and despondent, and that drooping has been ordained by God that you might endure your prosperity and truly prosper in it. Lest

your high places of success should cause you to slip, you have been kept low in spirit that you might be kept up in holy living to God's glory. You have been laid down that you might not fall down. God sometimes humbles His people that they may not need to be humbled, for to be humbled is terrible, but to be made humble by His grace is exceedingly sweet.

It is clear that our gracious Lord can hold us up by many methods. We are very far from having hinted at a tenth of them. I have known Him preserve His people by giving them great aspirations, high ideals, noble desires. With his eyes on the stars the sailor boy is steady at the masthead. I have known Him hold up His servants by giving them plenty to do—by putting them into the Sunday school and interesting them with the children, or drafting them into the Loan Tract Society, and keeping them there. It is a grand way of keeping us right—never to let us have an idle ten minutes, nor a spare napkin to wrap a talent in.

The supreme power which upholds us is the Holy Spirit, who, dwelling in us, warns us against evil, sets us on our watchtower against temptation, and incites us to all manner of good things, and so helps us to stand in the evil day. How much we owe to the love of the Spirit! He keeps the feet of the saints. When they are tried He quickens them, and by gaining more life they surmount temptation. When they are likely to be deceived He enlightens them, and so the evil one touches them not. By sanctification, by helping our infirmities, by teaching us the divine will, and by His divine comfort He holds us up, and to Him be glory forevermore.

Thus I have shown you the danger, and how it can be prevented. Oh, how sweetly can the Lord prevent it, and how He *has* prevented it in many of His dear people. In order to prove this, I could point you to biographies of godly men. Perhaps that might be better than giving you even a hint about

those who are yet alive, though there are many such and such among ourselves. As to the departed ones upon whom my mind is now resting, their Lord did not allow them to slip at any time, but their garments were always white. They had many dangers and perils, but they walked uprightly all their days. So far from their having slipped, there seemed to be nothing in them but what we could hold up for admiration, giving to God's grace all the praise.

Blessed are those men of faith who are never allowed to fall, in whom you see no groveling, whose noble lives are free from selfishness, and far above the aims of carnal men. In them was no bending, no stooping from uprightness, but a rising, a growing elevation, till even here, among the sons of men, they had a dignity and presence as of another world.

Thus I have set before you the upholding.

II. Briefly, I desire to show the TWO BLESSED THINGS THAT COME OUT OF THIS HOLDING UP.

If God uphold us, then, according to the text, we shall be *safe*. "Hold you me up, and I shall be safe." It is a great point to be safe, though there are some who prefer to be sharp. Some men are always trying little dodges by which they would take advantage of their neighbors. "A sharp fellow, that," cries one. "A desperately clever man," says another. "Hardly know where to find him," hints a third. "Rather sharper than honest," mutters a fourth. Just so. Now, if God holds you up, I do not say that you will be clever, but you will be what is a deal better, you will be safe.

"Hold you me up, and I shall be safe." That is, you will be safe from all real harm. Suppose that you should meet with great troubles in business, you will still be safe if God upholds you, so that you do not lose your integrity. So long as we do not lose a good conscience we have not lost much if we have lost all besides. He that damages his character has sustained the

worst damage a mortal man can know, but he that is held up—kept upright—has been kept safely. It may be that he shall be slandered, but if he knows that before God he has walked uprightly, he shall be “safe,” God will light his candle in due time and his light shall shine as the sun at noonday. Only if you hold fast your integrity, and will not let it go—and God’s grace can help you to do that—you shall be safe in calamity, peaceful in panic, happy in poverty, brave under slander, in fact “safe” in all senses of the term. Like the lighthouse on the lone rock, buffeted by the storm, you shall stand out above all tempests SAFE.

You shall be safe, too, from descending into grievous sin. The man who is held upright shall not insensibly sink lower and lower, as some do. Alas, I have seen the godly man put forth his hand unto iniquity. At first he seemed excused. No one could blame him. It was an hour of dire necessity, and that he was overcome and did a questionable thing was not much to be marveled at, though it was enough to make an angel weep that such a man as he should stoop to it. After once doing the questionable thing, he had spoiled the chastity of his conscience, and he was open to a grosser ill, and he fell into that grosser ill, yet still it was not such a fault as the world would much condemn. A little farther, and but a little farther, and he committed a crime that made the godly cast him off and the wicked exult over him. “Howl, fir tree; for the cedar is fallen!” For you and for me there is no safety in any degree of bending. We must stand upright or we cannot stand at all. “Hold you me up”—*up*, *up*—“and I shall be safe.” But if I begin to incline downward in any way I am not safe. He that leans will fall, but the upright will stand, for God is able to make him stand even unto the end.

I believe that when David said that by being held up he should be safe, he meant also that he should know that he was

safe, and should enjoy great restfulness of heart. Dear brothers and sisters, I know that you are very much tried in this world, and often tempted to do that which is not right. But, if God keeps you from evil, how happy you are, because you are “safe”! You have a light pocket, but a light heart too. Some have a heavy purse, and a heavy heart to go with it. It is better for you to be in poverty and to be holy, than it would be to be unholy and to roll in wealth. May God give you things convenient for you, so would I pray, but I would not ask Him to give you even a needful meal as the result of an evil deed, much less to succeed you in a dishonest transaction, for nothing can be worse than to do wrong and prosper in it.

If you are a child of God, there is no prosperity for you except by doing that which is right. Others may hoard the wages of unrighteousness, they would melt like hoarfrost in your hands. May you be prospered in all your works, and may your substance increase. If God ordains it, so will it be. And if it be not so, what a mercy it is to carry in your heart that little bird which sings “All is well! All is well!” He that can pick a bit of heartsease from within his bosom and wear it in his button-hole, need not envy my lord his stars and garters, for that herb called heartsease is more precious than all else that grows beneath the moon, and God makes it bloom in the garden of the man who walks uprightly.

The man that walks uprightly, and is kept in God’s way, is “safe,” and I venture to give another meaning to that word “safe”—namely, that he becomes a safe man in his dealings with others. If you catch a man playing the double shuffle at any time, let him play it for himself, but not for you. Never link yourself in business with a person who is capable of doing an unrighteous action. Sink or swim for yourself, but never set foot on board such a coffin ship. Sooner or later it will go to the bottom. May God make you to be upright, that you may be

a safe man, true and trustworthy, for men delight to trust in men when once they find them “safe.”

If you would possess the best of human friends, you will be happy should you meet with the man who in youth was an ardent Christian and has continued so throughout a generation. In times of stress and trial when others fell he stood upright and incorruptible. Under slander he has smarted, but he has outlived the reproach, and disproved every false report. Today his name is the guarantee of truth, the watchword of honor. Where he leads others feel it safe to follow, they wait till he speaks, and his judgment rules the board. Because the Lord kept him upright he grew to be safe in the esteem of his neighbors, and now he is as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the storm.

A truly good man is a haven in trouble, a harbor for those who are tossed with tempest, the sons of Adam in distress fly to him in his degree as they do to his Master. If he swears to his own hurt he changes not, but stands to the truth at all hazards, men admire this, and they trust him, if not with untold gold, yet with secrets which, to all other hearts, remain untold. May God make you such a man. The way to such honor lies by that prayer, “Hold you me up, and I shall be safe.”

But, lastly, when a man knows that he is “safe” by God’s grace, does he then become idle and careless, and think he may do as he likes? No, listen, “I shall be safe, and *I will have respect unto your statutes continually.*” Watchfulness attends such sacred safety, and is at once its fruit and its sign.

A holy man—a man made holy by God’s grace—has great respect to every command of God. Before he moves he looks round him to see whether he shall transgress by his proposed movement. You have heard of the child whose mother said, “John, you have broken one of the commandments,” and he answered, “Mother, those commandments are awfully easy to

break.” With such natures as ours, sin is a very easy thing. You break the law before you know it, and unless a man has respect unto all the commandments, he will soon be trespassing and getting into mischief.

We ought in our daily life to walk as one that has to tread among eggs or delicate china. Heedless and Too-bold soon rush into sin, but the genuine believer fears always. “You are very jealous of how you act,” said one to a saint of God. “Yes,” he replied, “I serve a jealous God.” “You are too precise,” said another. “That is a crime,” said he, “that God will never charge any of His children with.” A conscience tender as the apple of an eye is what we want. To be alarmed even at the distant approach of sin is the safeguard of a child of God. Those who dally with vice will rue such dalliance when it cannot be undone.

If somebody told me that there was a cobra at the far end of my room, I should look around for the door, I think such venomous creatures are near enough if they remain in their native jungles, I do not desire their interesting society. So should it be with sin. We should flee from it at once, avoiding its first appearance, hating it in thought and word before it hatches into act, abhorring even the garment spotted by the flesh.

This holy jealousy to do the Lord’s will, must last continually. “I will have respect unto your statutes continually.” I will always try to obey. I will always endeavor to avoid any transgression of the law. Now, dear friends, you see, this safety comes, and this special tenderness towards God’s law comes of God’s holding us up, for He holds us up so that we never go down. Under His incessant upholding we shall be “safe,” and we shall be conscientious, but not otherwise. A few minutes’ folly may ruin years of character. The man that is not held up goes down, and rolls in the mire, and he is never a

conscientious man or a “safe” man, perhaps, for the rest of his life.

I know some that I hope are God's people, but they have not been upheld so as to be always complete in their integrity, and consequently they are not “safe.” They are people that we have to watch over with great care, for we are afraid of them. We could not trust them to lead, for their example is a lame one. Moreover, they are not keenly, sensitively conscientious. They can go to much greater lengths than the Lord Jesus would approve, and yet they are members of the church and pretty talkative members too. May God improve them and mend them. They need it, but God alone can do it, for they do not take their minister's plain hints. These people have no clear and sharp discrimination of what is right and wrong according to God's way, but they go as far as they can towards the world, to enjoy the pleasures of the ungodly, and yet they would keep in with Christians. They are Jacks-of-both-sides. They run with the hare and yet hold with the hounds, and they will be glad to have a mouthful when the hounds catch the hare.

This is poor work, this produces a sorry sort of Christian. Under such double influences we shall be unsafe, and rather a curse to others than a blessing to them. If our integrity is always maintained by God, we shall become safe men, the pillars of the church, we shall have a tender conscience that will warn us of the approach of evil, and we shall be such as God can honor and make useful to the brethren.

So I close by commending to you, my dearly beloved in Christ, the prayer of the text, “Hold you me up.” Every morning before you see the face of men, register this prayer in heaven, “Hold you me up, and I shall be safe, and I shall have respect unto your statutes continually.”

Are you going downstairs without that prayer? Then you may fall into sin at the breakfast table. You may lose your

temper, and a trifle not worth noticing may put you off the tram lines for the day. Therefore pray ere the car moves. You have taken your hat and your gloves, and you are going off to the City. Does it happen that there you meet careless, godless men? Are you tempted there? Then as you get into your train, or as you trudge along the pavement, breathe the prayer, “Hold you me up, and I shall be safe.” You can meet the worst of men without fear. You have your shield on your arm and the twoedged sword of God at your side. You are prepared for all hazards now that the upholding prayer has been breathed before the Most High.

Did you say that you are not going to the City today? It is a day’s excursion, is it? You are going into the country to see friends, or you are to make holiday with a few companions? All well and good. You may have such recreations very properly, but now is a special time for the prayer, “Hold you me up.” Your friends will not be all saints, probably, and when they go a little way in mirth perchance they will run a little too far. Therefore, now entreat the Keeper of Israel, “Hold you me up, and I shall be safe”— safe at my play as well as at my work. The child of God in his recreation should prove that he has undergone a re-creation, which has made him a new creature in Christ Jesus. Grace should enter into all our enjoyments as well as into all our employments.

No, but that does not happen to be your lot. You are not indulged with a day’s pleasure, you are going to perform a service surrounded with difficulty. It tries your brain and frets your heart. It is more than you feel at all able to carry through, and yet you must do it. Now is your peculiar time of need. Now is the hour to pray, “Hold you me up.”

I have known young brethren who, when first they have gone to a bank, have been so anxious to have their balances right, and when they have gone around collecting have been so

careful to be correct that they have made great errors, not through any dishonesty, but simply through their blundering because they were so excited. In their consuming anxiety to be exact they have confused themselves into errors. Let the gracious young man do right and leave himself with God. Do not be nervous, but be prayerful. Ask the Lord to help you. Ask Him to help you about everything—about casting up a column of figures. My Lord Jesus counts the very hairs of His children's heads, and He will help them in their little things as well as in their great things. You may ask that you may have favor in the sight of those that employ you, and God will give it you if it is good for you. Only cry, "Lord, help me to do right, and if I make a mistake let it be a mistake, but You hold me up and upright to the end."

Perhaps, dear friends, you have to travel this week over a very unwelcome road, for you have been over it before, and wished that you had never seen it, and yet you have that journey in prospect, and there is no avoiding it. You have to visit those dangerous friends who led you into sore temptation two years ago. You have to undergo the second time an experience which before led you into sin. Then, pray eagerly, "Hold you me up." Ask for double grace now. You know the danger of the road, and your own feebleness, but you will get over it well enough by God's upholding grace.

But it may be, dear friends that you are prospering. God is giving you success, and the desire of your heart has come to you. Be sure to pray earnestly, "Hold you me up, and I shall be safe" for it is a dangerous thing for a child of God to prosper in this world, and yet it is a danger which many unwisely covet. If you are growing rich and great, pray God to hold you up.

Or it may be that you are now going down into adversity. Things have gone wrong with you, as you think. You have to give up that fine house and lovely garden. You are moving into

small rooms now. You need have small expenses, for your income has shrunk terribly. You hardly know how you shall support your wife and children. Now pray, “Hold you me up.” Use the prayer of Agur—“Give me neither poverty nor riches.” He that kept you when you were rich will not shun you now that you are poor. Ask Him to uphold you still, He is able to do it, and as willing as He is able.

Ah, some of you are getting old, I respectfully commend to you this prayer as suitable for the close of life. Young people, you must pray, for your passions are strong, and your wisdom is little. O young men and maidens, pray each one of you, “Hold you me up.” But, oh, dear aged brethren, excuse me who am so much younger, when I solemnly add, to you is this word of warning sent. Cease not to plead for upholding grace. Horses sometimes fall at the bottom of the hill, the drivers grew careless, and thought there was no further need for caution, and down went the horse. The worst falls I have ever seen in the church of God have happened to elderly men, men of experience and years. All through Scripture we meet with cases of the aged falling into sin. Mind that. They boast their experience and wisdom, and then the devil laughs in his sleeve and makes fools of them. If we were as old as Methuselah and as holy as Enoch we ought still to cry, “Hold you me up.”

And when we get to Jordan’s brink and the chill stream begins to rise to our ankles, what a blessing it is that the Lord will hold us up! “Courage, brother!” said Hopeful to Christian, when he was up to his neck in the stream—“Courage, my brother! I feel the bottom, and it is good.” And so they joyfully crossed over and they climbed the hill whereon the Celestial City was built. And there, I think, among the songs that we shall sing unto our Well-beloved this will be a peculiarly sweet one—“When I said, My foot slips; Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up.” “Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to

present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.”

1658 HEALED OR DELUDED? – JER. 8:11

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, May 7, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

They have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, saying, “Peace, peace; when there is no peace.”

— Jeremiah 8:11

“Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for You are my praise.”

— Jeremiah 17:14

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Psalm 101]

THE PEOPLE among whom Jeremiah dwelt had received a grievous hurt, and they felt it, for they were invaded by cruel enemies, their goods were plundered, their children were slain, and their cities burned. Jeremiah, with true love to his nation, warned them that the cause of all their trouble was that they had forsaken their God. They had turned aside from the living God, and had made gods of the idols of the nations round about them, and so had provoked Jehovah to jealousy. Therefore He chastened them sorely, and plagued them again and again, even as He had threatened them from of old. He took up the quarrel of His covenant, and He made them smart indeed. Jeremiah tried to show them that the only way to be healed of their hurt was to be healed of their sin, that if they would give up their idolatry and all the infamous wickedness

that grew out of it, and turn to the true God and obey His commandments, then brighter days would come. Their conscience must have told them that all this was true, but alas, Jeremiah preached to them in vain. As the old classic prophetess Cassandra was doomed forever to speak the truth and never to be believed, so was Jeremiah, the people heard him, but they regarded him not. Meanwhile, certain pretenders to prophecy opposed Jeremiah, and sought to win the confidence of the nation. They came with “Thus says the Lord” upon their lips, blasphemously pretending to be speaking in the name of Jehovah when Jehovah had not sent them, nor did they seek His glory. These suggested to the people easier remedies than repentance, they should make an alliance with Egypt, and in that way beat off the Assyrians. They should send a certain amount of tribute to the great king, and thus buy off his armies. They buoyed up the people’s hopes with vain confidences, and took them away from repentance and return to God. No good came of their teachings—they did but film the wound of the nation and left the deadly venom still within. The hopes which they excited lasted but for a little time, and then died out in blank despair. They had not touched the root which bore the wormwood. They had made light of the national sin. They had healed the hurt of Judah slightly, saying, “Peace, peace,” when there was no peace.

Today God’s servants, who are the true successors of the prophets, have a task before them sterner even than that of the ancient seers. It is not ours to point to smoking ruins and the carcasses of the unburied dead—plain evidences of a grievous hurt, but our work is to deal with spiritual sickness, and to come among a people who confess no hurt. Great multitudes of our hearers do not welcome the news of a heavenly remedy because they are not aware that they are sick. They are not only sound in wind and limb, but in head and heart. From the crown of

their head to the sole of their feet they have scarcely a blemish on them, or if they have some little spot here and there, yet they are much superior to the general run of mankind and need no special spiritual surgery. A physician who has to commence his practice by convincing his neighbors that they are sick has not a very hopeful sphere before him. Such is our work, we have first of all to declare in the name of the God of the truth, that man is fallen, that his heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, that he is a sinner doomed to die, and such a sinner that there is no reclaiming him unless the Ethiopian can change his skin and the leopard his spots. Truths so humiliating to human pride are by no means popular. Men prefer to hear the smooth periods of those who parade the dignity of human nature. The very phrase grates on my ears, talk of the dignity of a dunghill and you are as near the mark. Man, viewed as fallen, descends below the level of the beast which perishes, for the beast has not offended its Creator. See how Adam's proud descendants rage against this truth. To persuade them of it is a work so hard as to be utterly hopeless unless the Spirit of God Himself shall undertake it. It is a divinely wise arrangement that He has undertaken it, as it is written, "When He, the Spirit of truth, is come He shall convince the world of sin."

When that great labor is accomplished we have yet another remaining, namely, to excite in men a desire to seek healing. Many there are who confess their disease, but the disease of sin has worked in them a spiritual lethargy, so that they find a horrible rest in their lost estate, and have no longing to rise to spiritual health, of which, indeed, they know nothing. They are guilty, and willing to remain guilty, inclined to evil, and content with the inclination. Hundreds live and die in this condition. They know that there is a wrath to come on account of sin, but they put far from them the evil day, and amuse themselves with

the mirth of the present. They do not deny that a great change must be undergone by them before they can enter heaven, but then there is time enough for this, for even at the 11th hour they may be called by grace. They are willing to run the risk of gasping out a last penitential prayer, and so they give mercy a denial, refusing the Good Physician, because they are afraid of being well too soon. Ah, me! We must bring them out of this. They will perish unless they are quickened out of this indifference; they will sleep themselves into hell unless we can find an antidote to the opiates of sin. Like the rich man, of whom we read that in hell he lifted up his eyes being in torments, they will dream on till their awakening will be too late. Would to God they might lift up their eyes while there is yet a hope of their beholding Christ upon the cross and finding everlasting life in Him.

After these things are done, we have but stormed the outworks of the castle, for there still remains another difficulty. Convinced that they need healing, and made in a measure anxious to find it, the danger with the awakened is lest they should rest content with an apparent cure, and miss the real work of grace. We are perilously likely to rest satisfied with a slight healing, and by this means to miss the great and complete salvation which comes from God alone. I wish to speak in deep earnestness to everyone here present upon this subject, for I have felt the power of it in my own soul. To deliver this message I have made a desperate effort, quitting my sick bed without due permit, and moved by a restless pining to warn you against the counterfeits of the day.

I have taken two texts. First, that I may show how easy it is for us to be deluded into a slight healing, and secondly, that I may plead with you to seek real healing, and lastly, that I may plainly show where the true healing is to be had according to

the teaching of our second text, “Heal me, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved.”

I. First, then, we sorrowfully assert that **IT IS, VERY EASY, FOR US TO BE THE SUBJECTS OF A FALSE HEALING.** You will kindly understand that I am not going to talk about the inhabitants of the Island of Laputa, I am now speaking straight to every one of you, and I am setting myself in the middle pew that my keenest sentence may enter my own heart as well as yours. I say, we are all of us in danger of being the subjects of a false healing, ministers, deacons, elders, church members, aged professors, and young beginners—all alike.

We might infer this from the fact that no doubt *a large number of persons are deceived*. If a large number of persons are so, then why should not we be? The tendency of other men is probably also in us. Why not? Are there not many persons who consider that all is well with them because they have been observant of church ordinances from their youth up, and their parents were observant for them before they actually came upon the stage of responsibility? Were they not duly christened and correctly confirmed? Have they not taken the sacrament? Have they not gone through every form that is required by the sect to which they belong? What more can be needed? They do not, in so many words, assert that these ceremonies have given them perfect wholeness before God, but secretly they pour this flattering anointing upon their souls and lie down in quietness. If they are not all right, where will you find any who are? On the other hand, it may be that some now present are thankful that they never were christened nor confirmed, and they think a good deal of not having undergone those ceremonies. Let them not err in the same way as those they are judging. They have been attentive to religion from their own point of view, they are never absent from their pew, they like to be at prayer meetings, they enjoy everything that has the stamp of

Christianity upon it, and therefore they inquire no further, but take their safety for granted. They are afraid of digging too deep, and so they are satisfied with having a form of godliness. Though they have felt no change of heart, and no renewal of spirit, they nevertheless believe that all is well with them, at least they hope so, and therefore they are at ease in Zion. This is a poor, slovenly soul-surgery which will end in eternal death. Beware of it, I pray you, while yet a work of grace may be worked upon you.

Too many are reliant entirely upon external religion. If that is attended to carefully they conclude that all is right. To sing a hymn is in their minds a good thing, though their heart never praises God. To join in the posture of prayer is to them an excellent thing, though their heart never cries to God for mercy. Alas, that men should dream that the hollow hypocrisy which insults God with empty forms should have a magical virtue in it. Oh, that man should be so mad as to conceive that the bringing of the mere husks and bran of external devotion to God can be anything to Him but sheer mockery, provoking Him to greater wrath! And yet they mock God with pretended prayers, and feel pleased with their crime. They chant a heartless hymn and so vex His Spirit, and yet they are pacified by their empty song. The very deeds that will be mentioned against them to condemnation, they quote to their darkened mind as hopeful grounds of justification. Outward religion is a slight and pretended healing; being in fact no healing at all, but a cry of, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace.

I am afraid, too, that many, who do not rely upon religious forms, yet confide in doctrinal beliefs. They are sound in the faith—Orthodox, Evangelical and Calvinistic. They heartily detest any doctrine that is not Scriptural. I am glad to find that it is so with them, but let them not rest in this. To cover a wound with a royal garment is not to heal it, and to conceal a

sinful disposition beneath a sound creed is not salvation. Believe what you may, even though you should know the whole truth of God, yet if your faith never changes your heart nor affects your life, you will in no way be superior to the devil who believes, no, you may not be quite so good as he, for devils believe *and tremble*, and to believe without trembling is a stage lower down. Oh, my dear hearer, I implore you, do not rest content with such a slight healing as this. I have heard of one who changed from a Churchman to a Dissenter, and another who changed from a Dissenter to a Churchman, but I long to hear of you that you have turned from sin to righteousness, from self to Jesus. Conversions may be no better than perversions unless they are conversions to Christ. We must know the truth in the heart or we do not know it at all. Dry doctrine may kill, it is only living truth, worked in us by the Spirit of God, that can make us alive.

Many are the quackeries of the spiritual world, and multiplied are the panaceas of the physicians of no value, yielding to men a slight and transient hope. If others are deceived, may not you be?

Depend upon this, that *if there is a chance of our being deceived at all, we are always ready to aid in the deception*. As a rule, we are all inclined to think too well of ourselves. I dare say that if any cautious flatterer will assure me that I am a very wise person, I shall before long come to the conclusion that he is a remarkably sensible and far-seeing individual. If anyone should accuse you of a virtue which you never possessed, if he would but persevere long enough with his pleasing insinuation, you will begin to smile inwardly, and hint to your conscience that there are latent excellences about you which this man with the prophetic glance has discovered. The devil, who knows the exact bait for poor human nature, finds it easy to pacify an anxious mind by presenting a false salvation, and persuading

the heart that all is well, while in fact nothing is well. A little feeling of natural regret flits over the mind, and the false fiend whispers, "It is repentance." "Oh, yes," says the ready dupe, "I am a penitent." A little presumptuous deceiving of ourselves into comfort is indulged and the deceiver sings, "Hail, precious faith." How pleased we are when we jump to the conclusion that we have passed from death unto life, and are indeed, the servants of the living God. We do not look back to see whether there was any new birth, whether there was any change of heart, whether there was any giving up of sin, whether there was any laying hold on righteousness, whether there was any severance from self and union to Christ. Those inquiries may be troublesome, and therefore the irksome duty of self-examination is cried down as unbelief, and we are bid to shut our eyes and make up our minds that all is right. "Believe that you are well and you are well" seems to be the gospel of many, but it is not the gospel of Jesus. But it is so easy to jump into fancied security that many take to it. We are almost all of us on the side of that which is most easy and comfortable to ourselves, the exceptions to this rule are a few morbid spirits who habitually write bitter things against themselves, and a few gracious souls whom the Holy Spirit has convinced of sin who would comfort themselves if they could, but dare not do so. They are dying for want, and yet their soul abhors all manner of meat. I do not suppose I shall do any good this morning except to this last class, and they are few. But the words I shall speak will reach *their* ears I know, and I pray God it may drop into their hearts to comfort them. Take this, then, for granted, that there are many ways of being slightly healed, and we are most of us likely to be pleased with one or other of them.

Besides, *flatterers are not yet an extinct race*. False prophets abounded in Jeremiah's day, and they still may be met with. I could indicate where they are, but I advise you not to go after

them. They are to be found in several places of worship in London, but you had better leave them alone. There is a flatterer in your own bosom, namely, proud self. Another flatterer often crosses your path, and is eager to destroy your soul, I mean Satan. If by any possibility you can be beguiled to put up with something which looks like healing, but which is not, you shall have all the art and craft of hell to help you in it. If it is possible, the very elect shall be thus deceived. Instead of faith, they shall have presumption; for regeneration, they shall have reformation; for holiness, morality; for purity, censoriousness; for zeal, fanaticism; for grace, fancy; and for Christ and His cross, human works and their merit. Many who profess to love you will aid the general deceit, and puff you up with the idea of being what you are not.

Slight healing is sure to be fashionable among a great many, because it requires so little thought. People will do anything but think according to the word of God. They will both think and speak against the revealed will and truth of God, but to consider what the Lord has said is not at all to their mind. They bring forward philosophical notions which read like passages of a comedy. He seems to be most honored nowadays who will invent the most monstrous theory, and stands to it, the more absurd it is, the better, so long as it is opposed to the Bible and to the accepted beliefs. I do not hesitate to say that any ordinary person, who would dethrone his reason and enthrone his imagination, could dream up as many good theories in a day as have been invented during the last 50 years by our vain-glorious philosophers. Give him sufficient liquor to make him half drunk, and he might invent many more, and those far more philosophical than the folly which rules the wisdom of the present hour. The more the philosophies stagger, the more they will suit this present age, for that which is really reasonable and solid is rejected. Sober thought about one's own soul and its destiny is by no means a

favorite occupation with men. How few sit down and answer the question, “How much do you owe unto my Lord?” They would sooner hear a thunderclap than be asked to consider their ways. They would sooner be flogged than sit down and say to their soul—“How have you dealt towards your Creator? What is your state towards your Redeemer? What of love, what of fear, what of holy confidence, what of consecration have you ever given to Jesus Christ your Lord? How will it go with you when you come to die? How will you fare in the swellings of Jordan? How will you meet the Judge of all the earth in the Judgment Day?” Such questions as these they put back as only fit for women and for priests. Yet were they truly manly they would be eager to look such inquiries in the face. O sirs, it is a grievous pity that men should be lost for lack of thought. I would gladly hold you by the sleeve and beg you to remember and consider. Because superficial religion only requires so much church-going, or attendance at a sermon, or so many half-guineas, so much repeating of pious phrases, and listening to pious periods, it suits the thoughtless, but as to seeking after God by meditation, prayer, confession, faith, they cannot, away with it!

Superficial religion also will always be fashionable *because it does not require self-denial*. A man may be outwardly religious and yet be a private tippler, but he cannot be a true Christian at that rate, such secret defilement he must abandon. That, however, is a blow too near the root for many, they like not so sharp an axe as that. Or perhaps he has enmity towards his brother. Now he can go to mass or attend early communion, and yet hate his brother, but he cannot go to heaven and do that, he cannot be a regenerate man and do that. He may be following all the while some secret lust, and yet be a great man in his church, so long as he can keep his wantonness hidden away from prying eyes. A superficial religion suits the unclean gentleman, but genuine

godliness will not allow a darling lust to live. Do you wonder that vital godliness is at a discount when it proclaims war to the knife against a lifelong indulgence? It is with Christ as it might be in surgery. Two eminent practitioners profess to deal with the disease called polypus. The first declares that he can work an effectual cure, but it must be understood that he uses the knife freely. He believes no cure to be possible unless all the roots of the growth are taken away. He will not pretend to half measures, the whole thing must be eliminated, or he can work no cure. On the other side of the street another surgeon of great name depends upon an outward application which, in quite a painless manner, acts upon the diseased part, and according to his statements secures the desired result. He says, "My friend goes too deep and makes too much of the matter. Come in here. The disease is a mere trifle. I will end the mischief without cutting and hacking." You can readily guess how popular this last gentleman will be if he can gain public confidence. But what will be the end of it? That is the point. If the sharp and deep cut of the first surgeon ministers to ultimate health, and is absolutely necessary to a cure, is it not best? If, in the second case, the end of all those honeyed words is but the covering up of a foul loathsomeness, which will breed corruption and hasten death, is it not a wicked deception? Yet most men are so foolish as to choose the worse of the two in the affairs of their souls.

Slight healing, also, is sought by men, because *it does not require spirituality*. There are multitudes of men who, if the kingdom of heaven were to be had by outward actions, no matter how difficult, would at once commence the task. Say, "You must save so many hundreds of pounds and buy heaven," and they would starve themselves until they had hoarded up the money. Anything that could be done by the body would be cheerfully attempted, but true religion is spiritual, and carnal

men cannot get at it. It is high above, and out of their sight. They ask us “How can we be saved?” We tell them. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Then they reply, “But what is this believing?” and they try and make believing into a kind of hard mechanical action of the understanding, by which it receives certain facts about Christ, just as it believes in Roman or Grecian history. They do not grip at the idea that it is the heart’s resting upon Christ. When we begin to preach repentance and faith they appear to be in a fog, they cannot get at our meaning, because they are prejudiced by other modes of thought. Hence it is that the slight healing which comes of formalism and ceremonies, seeing it deals with outward manipulations, at once attracts them.

But, my dear hearers let me warn you with all the energy I possess against ever being satisfied with any of the slight healings that are cried up nowadays, because they will *all end in disappointment*, as sure as you are living men. I could wish that they might speedily end, so you could begin again, and begin right. Believe me; sickness is often a time when a man is led to turn over the pages of his past life, to see whether they will bear inspection. It will be a fearful thing when you are racked with pain and depressed in spirit to see all your evidences blotted and blurred, and all your hopes of heaven cancelled by the hand of truth before your sight. Suffering times call for realities, solid facts, eternal verities, for then it is that dark thoughts crowd in upon the soul, and anxious questions which must and will have an answer. Then conscience talks in this fashion, “You must be born again.” Are you born again? “Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.” Has that blood-shedding ever come near to you? Such thoughts as these gather around the spirit in the dead of night, and haunt the soul in the weary watches, when you toss to and fro and cannot sleep. Unless you fix your eyes upon the cross, and can answer, “I have believed

in Jesus for salvation, and I still believe in Him. I have forsaken every evil way, and I am still striving against sin. I am a renewed man, I am struggling to the light, and struggling up to purity and to my God”—unless, I say, you can give such firm and solid answers, there will be hard times for you, and deep depressions far more grievous than the physical pain could possibly bring to you. I pray you therefore do not put off making sure work for eternity.

Remember that if you pass through this life deceived, there will await you, an awful undeceiving in the next world. I will not try to depict the man who finds himself lost forever, though he died in the odor of sanctity. What will be his horror when he finds himself cast out, and hears the Lord Jesus say, “I never knew you”? Your minister knew you, the deacons knew you, the members knew you, but the Lord Jesus never did, for you had no heart-fellowship with Him and were not in heart a believer in Him. O brethren, if there is any error about your profession get it right *now*. Do not go on under a delusion. Surely you cannot wish to be puffed up with vain imaginations of hopes which are fallacious. Search then, and see. Beg the Lord to search you, and let your state before Him be in all things according to truth.

Time flies, and so does my strength, and therefore we must hasten to the second point.

II. BE IT OURS TO SEEK TRUE HEALING. But then, as we have already said, this true healing must be radical. Oh, pray to have it so! The healing which we need must go to the root of the business, and work a thorough change. Such a work is described in Scripture as a creation—“created anew in Christ Jesus,” it must be a resurrection—“And you has He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” Now, I ask you, my dear brethren, whether you can undertake this. Creation and resurrection, do these lie in your power? You can do nothing

of the kind, and so you are driven to my second text, “O Lord, heal me, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved.” Be it known unto every one of you, men and brethren, that you must be the subjects of a divine power by which you must be as totally changed as if you had been annihilated and then created anew. By this divine agency you must be as really changed as if you were dead and buried, and then were raised again from the dead. There is no soul-healing, no soul-saving apart from this. Does this strike you with despair? I am glad of it, for this kind of despair is next door to eternal hope. When a man despairs of himself he will begin to trust in his God. Oh that we might each one now lie at Christ’s feet as dead till He shall touch us and say, “Live.” Truly, I desire no life but that which He gives. I would be quickened by His Spirit, and find in Him my life, my all.

Now go a step further. The healing we need must be a healing from the guilt of sin. My anxious friend, you must no longer be guilty, you must be free from fault. Every offense you have ever committed must be washed right out, even the least stain of it must vanish, and it must be as though it had never been, and you must be as though you never had offended at all. “How can that be?” you ask. It is clear it cannot be by anything that you can do, and this again drives you to the prayer of my text, “Heal me, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved.” How can it be? Only by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Savior. He took the sin of His people upon Him, became their substitute and representative, bore their iniquity, and was made a curse for them, and in consequence they are set free, cleared, and justified. What a word was that, “Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, and against the man that is My fellow, says the Lord of hosts.” Beneath that sword our Shepherd offered up His life a ransom for the flock. By one tremendous sacrifice which He offered unto the Father, the

Lord Jesus delivered all His redeemed. Look to Jesus Christ, and in a moment your sins have ceased to be. “With His stripes we are healed.” Hallelujah! The day comes when the sins of Jacob shall be sought for, and they shall not be found, yes, they shall not be, says the Lord. Blessed healing this! Who but a divine Physician could work such a cure? This is pardon worthy of a God.

But you must not only be free from sin, you must be freed from sinfulness, a work must be worked in you, my dear brothers and sisters, and in me, by which we shall be clean rid of every tendency to do evil. We cannot enter into heaven with sinful tendencies, corruption and depravity cannot be endured before the throne of the thrice holy Jehovah. The very roots and rootlets of sin must come out of the nature which is to share the abode of God. Does not this drive you to despair? Does not this make you cry, “Heal me, O God, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved”? It ought to do so, and in so doing it will work your safety. In answer to your cry the eternal Spirit shall come upon you, creating you anew in Christ Jesus. He shall come and dwell in you, and shall break down the reigning power of sin, putting it beneath your feet. Though this defeated foe shall strive and struggle like a serpent with his back broken, yet it has its death wound, and cannot regain its former dominion. It will struggle so long as you are in this life, but it must ultimately die, and you shall attain perfection—

“Sin, my worst enemy before,
Shall vex my eyes and ears no more;
My inward foes shall all be slain,
Nor Satan break my peace again.”

No tendency to sin, no affection towards evil, no fear of relapse, nor danger of apostasy shall remain, but there shall be

in us the living and incorruptible seed, and we shall be the members of Christ's body. We shall be as pure as Adam when he was first created, we shall have about us a purity superior to that of mere creation, a purity produced by the infusion of the divine life. We came into this world defiled by original sin, but every trace of this will vanish through the work of the Spirit of God and the washing in the precious blood. This is a work which can only be worked in us by God Himself. Oh to be so saved that we can survive divine inspection, a divine inspection by which every spot would be revealed if spots were there, but we shall be without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.

It is most desirable to be so healed in soul as to stand the test of this present life. I have known friends, discharged from the hospital as healed of disease, who were bitterly disappointed when they came into everyday life, a little exertion made them as ill as ever. A person had a piece of diseased bone in her wrist, it was taken out by the hospital surgeon, and the arm seemed perfectly healed. But when she began to work the old pain returned, and it was evident that the old mischief was still there, and that a part of the decayed bone remained. Thus some are saved, so they think, but it is only in seeming, for when they get into the world, and are tried with temptation, they are just the same as they used to be. They have not received a practical salvation, and nothing but practical salvation is worth having. A sham cure is worse than none. If a bone is ill set it is often necessary to break it again, and it sometimes seems to me that certain converts need their hearts to be broken again that they may be truly comforted. If any man here has been healed, but his arm will not work for Jesus and for righteousness, it needs breaking again. And I should not mind if my sermon should break it, so long as he was driven to Christ to get it set in the right fashion. If you cannot resist

the temptations of this life, depend upon it, your salvation is a mere myth.

We want to have a salvation that will bear the test of sickness, and the strain of death, so that a man may lie back on his bed and say, “I do not fear to die. Jesus Christ has made me perfectly whole, and among the healed ones before His throne I shall shortly stand and sing His praises world without end.” Oh, my dear hearers, could you die like that? Have you a hope which will bear the light of your last hours? If you have not, do not let this day close until you have found it. I beseech you at once cry to Jesus to save you in His own effectual way.

III. I close by saying, **LET US GO WHERE TRUE HEALING IS TO BE HAD.** It is quite certain that God is able to heal us of all our sins, for He who created can restore. Whatever our diseases, nothing can surpass the power of omnipotent love. Blessed be the name of the Lord, no work of grace can be beyond His will, for He delights in mercy. His name is Jehovah-Rophi, the Lord that heals you, and He has given us a sweet word, “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely.” You remember how David sang, “He sent His word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions”? The Lord is so fond of healing sin-sick souls, that He had but one son, and He made a physician of Him that He might come and heal mankind of their deadly wound. And He being made a physician came down among us, and sought out for His patients, not the good and excellent, but the most guilty, for He said, “The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Jesus, then, the beloved Physician is able and willing to meet the case of every one of us. His wounds are an unfailing remedy. Oh, that you were willing to come to Him and spread your case before Him. Come at once. Even at this instant. Jesus certainly

can meet your condition, though apart from Him it may be utterly hopeless.

As I turned over my text while coming here, I was charmed with the encouragement which it offers to the very chief of sinners, for these may say to themselves, “Is it, after all, God’s work to save? Well, then, He can save a great sinner as well as a little sinner.” If salvation were of works or of merits then many persons would evidently be excluded from hope, but if it is entirely of grace then none are excluded. And if the power is found in God and not in us, then the same power which can save the most moral young man can save the most dissolute and debauched person, and the same grace which can save the godly matron can save the impious harlot. The power of God is equal to any miracle. The mercy of God can go any length. Tell it; tell it that Jesus Christ is able to have compassion on the ignorant, and to save those who are out of the way. Out of the way sinners, outrageous sinners, black sinners, scarlet sinners, they, too, may pray the prayer, “Heal me, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved.” If it is of grace, then surely hope is encouraged where otherwise despair might reign supreme. If it is of pure mercy, then the utmost guilt need not shut out a soul from heaven. Would God, dear friends, you would come and try the unfailing grace of God in Christ Jesus, which is unto all and upon all them that believe. I know while I am preaching that certain of you say, “He does not mean me: I am too great a sinner.” On the other hand, another class imagines that they are not sinful enough, so they also fancy that the discourse is not meant for them. Oh that you would give up this wicked perversity, and know that all truth that applies to you is meant for you. I have heard of Robert Burns that, on one occasion when at church, he sat in a pew with a young lady whom he observed to be much affected by certain terrible passages of Scripture which the minister quoted in his sermon. The wicked

wag scribbled on a piece of paper a verse which he passed to her. I fear that the substance of that verse has been whispered into many of your ears full often—

*“Fair maid, you need not take the hint,
Nor idle texts pursue;
’Twas only sinners that he meant,
Not angels such as you.”*

This sermon is meant for those who think themselves angels as well as for those who know themselves to be sinners. Cease from all dreamy confidences, awaken yourselves from proud self-content, and come to Jesus the Savior, who alone can save from sin and death.

I love my text because it gives security for the future. “Heal me, and I shall be healed.” Certain theologians appear to doubt the lasting nature of the divine cure, and fancy that Christ’s patients may die after all. Would they have us pray, “Lord, heal me, and I shall not be healed”? Yet that would be the way to pray if we may fall from grace and perish. We do not believe in this questionable healing, but we pray, “Heal me, and I shall be healed.” If you are saved by a priest or by yourself, you may be lost, but if God saves you, you never will be lost. That which God does, He does forever. The Lord never puts His hand to a creation which He leaves unfinished. He that is born again cannot be unborn. We may unravel all that is of nature’s weaving, but that which is God’s workmanship defies the infernal powers. There stands the promise, sure forever— “I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand.”

Dear friends, if you are saved, pray the Lord that you may be saved indeed, and if you are not saved, get to Him and pray Him to begin His good work within your souls. I am often

anxious about this congregation. I do not want to build up in this place a host of hopes that are ill-founded. I felt that I must come and deliver this message at this time, though I am quite unfit to be among you. I have not delivered it as I hoped to do, still there it is, and unto God I commend it. I was told if I preached this morning I should suffer a month's relapse as the consequence of it, but I ran the risk, because I could not be quiet till I had delivered my soul. Oh that the careless might be disquieted. Oh that the penitent might be encouraged. Let none of us excuse ourselves from self-examination. Do not let the preacher, or the deacons, or the workers in this church deceive themselves. Let us get on the rock and know that we are on it. Let us be true men, true to the core, sincere right through and through. Let us pray God that there may be a work of grace in us, and not the mere outgrowth of human will, and fancy, and self-flattery. If there are any who have not even felt the slight healing, I am glad they have not. May their wounds never be bound up till Jesus binds them. May none of us ever think of health unless it comes from beneath the wings of the Sun of righteousness. May we all stand together and gaze with tearful eyes upon the cross of our Lord. He is all my salvation, all my desire, and all my praise. If I perish, it shall be at His feet. If I live, it shall be in His service. Amen.

1659 A FEAST FOR THE UPRIGHT – PS. 84:11-12

**A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, May 14, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington**

**For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give
grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from those
who walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that
trusts in You. — Psalm 84:11-12**

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Psalm 84; Ephesians 1]

IN THIS SWEET Sabbath Psalm the writer rejoices in the house of God. He evidently loves the place of godly assembly, the place where prayer and praise were offered by the united tribes of his people. But, brethren, there was no superstition in this love. He loved the house of God because he loved the God of the house. His heart and flesh cried out, not for the altar and the candlestick, but for his God. True, his soul fainted for the courts of the Lord, but the reason was that he cried out for the living God, saying, “When shall I come and appear before God?” Brethren, it is well to take an interest in the place where you gather for worship. I am always glad when brethren are moved to contribute towards the necessary maintenance of the building and the provision for its cleanliness and propriety. I hate that God should be served in a slovenly way. Even the place where we meet to worship should show some sign of reverence for His name. But still our respect for our place of

assembly must never degenerate into a superstitious reverence for the mere structure, as though there were some peculiar sanctity about the spot, and prayer offered there would be more acceptable than elsewhere. The great objective of our desire must be to meet with God Himself. In hearing, the point is to hear the voice of God. In singing, the charm is truly to praise the Most High. In prayer, the main objective is to plead with God, and so to speak that our cry comes up before Him, even into His ears. Let us always remember this, and never rest content with merely going to a set place. Let us reckon that we have failed if we have not met with God. Let us come up here with strong desire for communion with the Lord in spirit and in truth.

The Psalmist also knew right well that the spiritual law runs through everything. He perceived that character is an essential, not only to acceptable worship, but to all real blessedness. In our text he speaks not of those who visit the temple, but of those who walk uprightly and trust in God. There is no necessary blessedness in visiting tabernacles and temples. In all assemblies for worship the question is, "Who are they that gather?" Are their hearts in God's ways? Are their souls thirsting after God? The promises are very rich, but to whom are the promises made? What if they are not made to us? Then, the richer they are the more sorrowful will be our loss of them.

Before I unfold the inexhaustible treasures of this marvelous portion of Scripture, I want to dwell upon this fact that these things are for a special people. *The blessing is to the man that walks uprightly*, the true-hearted man, whose course is sincere, righteous, honest, and just. He stands firmly, and he walks erect. He does not bend and lean towards the right or to the left. He has no sinister motives or crooked policies. He is straight as a line, and is not to be swayed by any side winds. It is a very suggestive figure, an upright man is not twisted, or

doubled up, or wrongly inclined, or tortuous in his ways and thoughts. He stands on the square, and is distinctly perpendicular. This is the man who will enjoy the blessing from the God of Israel. Sin is a twist, and it is a twist that robs us of the blessing in our text. But, since no man is upright by nature, we are reminded of the way by which we come to be upright—“O Lord of hosts, *blessed is the man that trusts in You.*” We must have faith as the groundwork of all. Then “faith works by love,” and purifies the soul, and by this purification the man is made to walk uprightly. Oh, to be resting where God bids us rest, namely, in the atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus! Oh, to be depending where all must depend—upon the faithfulness of the covenant-making and the covenant-keeping God. Such a man has a solid rock beneath his feet. He trusts in God, and so he stands firmly, and is able to walk uprightly, because he has a firm foothold. Judge you, then, yourselves. Do you trust in the Lord? Are you walking uprightly? If so, here is “a feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well-refined.”

I would say to every child of God who can claim the character I have been describing, come to the text and freely enjoy it. What; does no star of hope shine in your midnight sky? Do clouds surround you and thicken into an impenetrable gloom? Come to the text, for “the Lord God is a sun.” Here is an end to all your darkness. When He appears the night vanishes, and your light has come. Are you in great danger? Do perils surround you—temptations from the world, assaults of Satan, uprisings of your own corruption? Do you feel as if you moved in the center of a fierce fight? Is it as much as you can do even to hope that you will escape the fiery dart? Come to the text, then, and behold how He that keeps Israel has provided for your safety. Read the blessed words, “The Lord God is a shield.” He is a broad shield that shall cover you from

head to foot, and quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. Here is perfect safety for all who take Jehovah to be their helper. “The Lord is your shade upon your right hand. The sun shall not smite you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve you from all evil: He shall preserve your soul.”

But perhaps you tell me that you feel empty of all good, and dry of all joy. Spiritual life is at very low ebb with you. You can scarcely believe, much less reach to full assurance. You scarcely feel enough life to exhibit the tenderness you sigh for, and you cannot reach to the faith you desire. I hear your groans, but come along with you. Here is the exact word for you. “The Lord will give grace.” His rich free favor waits to bless the undeserving, and it is so strong and influential that those who have nothing in themselves may at once receive every precious thing. The God of all grace will give grace.

“Yes,” you say, “I have grace, but I find that the gracious life is a very struggling one. I am contending from day to day with my inward corruptions, and besides, the infirmities of old age have been creeping upon me for years, and I feel them so bitterly that I wish for the wings of a dove that I might fly away and be at rest.” Friend, you need not fly far. The text promises you the best possible rest. The Lord who says that He will give grace now tells you that He will give *glory*. Wait a little longer. The sun which shines more and more will come to perfect day. “It is better on before.” Glory will soon be in your actual possession—much sooner than you think. Between you and heaven there may be but a step. Perhaps before another sun has risen on the earth you may behold the face “of the King in His beauty in the land that is very far off.” At any rate, here is comfort for you; the same Lord who will give grace will also give glory.

Do I hear another brother sighing because he is in the depths of poverty? And is that poverty not only of bread and

of water, but a poverty of soul? Do you feel straitened in spirit, and so weak that you can hardly call a promise your own? Yet, dear brother, if you are trusting in the Lord, and He has helped you to walk uprightly, do not hesitate, but come to the text, and dip your bucket into this deep and overflowing well, and fill it up to the brim, for what does the text say? “No good thing will He withhold from those that walk uprightly.” Here is everything for nothing, everything for you, everything to be had at once according as you shall require it. It is God’s word, not mine, God’s own sure word which gives you all this blessing. Come, then, quit the dust and the darkness. Mount into brightness, and rejoice in the Lord your God, who bids you shout for joy.

Have you fears about the future? I need not stay to tell you how sweetly the text will lull them all to sleep. Yet suffer me these few sentences. Do you fear the darkness of future trial? The Lord God is your sun. Do you fear dangers which lie before you in some new sphere upon which you are just entering? The Lord will be your shield. Are there difficulties in your way? Will you need great wisdom and strength? God’s grace will be sufficient for you, and His strength will be glorified in your weakness. Do you fear failure? Do you dread final apostasy? It shall not be. He who gives you grace will without fail, give you glory. Between here and heaven there is provender for all the flock of God, so that they need not fear famishing on the road. He that leads them shall guide them into pastures that never wither, and to fountains that are never dried up, for “no good thing will He withhold from those that walk uprightly.”

Is not this a glorious text? It overpowers me. It is a gem of priceless value. I feel as if I could not place it in a proper setting, but must hold it up just as it is, and turn it this way and that, and bid you mark how each facet flashes forth the light of

heaven. It is a true Kohinoor among the gems of promise. It is so many sided, so transparent, so brilliant, it belongs to the King of kings, and He bids us wear it this day. What shall I hope to say which will be worthy of this supreme Scripture? How can my words fitly set forth this word of the Lord? It would not be an ill way of considering my text if I were to preach from it in this fashion.

First let us observe what God is, “The Lord God is a sun and a shield.” By nature He is both these to His people, and as such He is ours, for is not this a leading article in the covenant of grace, “I will be their God”? “The Lord is my portion, says my soul.” The Lord has given Himself to me as He is, even as Jehovah, the I AM. Is God omnipotent? He is almighty for His people. Is He omniscient? His wisdom cares for them. Is God omnipresent? Is God immutable? Is God eternal? Is God infinite? He is ours in all those respects. The Lord God is a sun and shield, and as sun and shield He belongs to those who are trusting in Him and walking uprightly.

If we preached thus our second head would be *what God will give*. The Lord will give grace and glory. He has given them, is giving them, and will give them, for the tense may be taken as you choose. He always will give free favor and kindly aid. He has given you grace up to now, and done great things for you, and He will show you greater things than these—

“His grace will to the end
Stronger and brighter shine.
Nor present things, nor things to come,
Shall quench the spark divine.”

He will supply you with grace and glory as the generous grants of His love. They are not a wage, but a gift. “The wages

of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.” Glory will come to you on free-grace terms.

And then there is, thirdly, *what the Lord will withhold*, and what is that? Why, nothing at all that is good, for “no good thing will He withhold.” We have among us some men who are great at withholding. If they give, it costs them an effort, but if they withhold, their purse strings are in their natural condition. Our God never was a withholding God yet. He makes His sun to shine upon the evil and upon the good. Ever since that first day when “He spoke and it was done,” He has gone on manifesting Himself to this world, pouring out Himself in goodness, spreading His own care and love over all, so that He is to be found filling all space and sustaining all existence. God’s blessedness delights in scattering blessings. To withhold would not enrich Him as to give does not impoverish Him. Especially to His saints does He abound, to them He gives all things. “No good thing will He withhold from those that walk uprightly.”

I am not going to preach from the text in that way. We shall survey it in another fashion. Here flows a living stream, bring your buckets with you. Take care that you do not come to this river of life merely to gaze on its surface, the river of God is full of water, and it is all intended for our use. Oh, for a hearty draft at this good hour! Here is enough and to spare, make free with it, O you trusters in the Lord.

I. First, then, out of five particulars, here are, for God’s people, **BLESSINGS IN THEIR FULLNESS**, for “*the Lord God is a sun.*”

The blaze of my text almost blinds me. It does not say, “God is light,” though that is true, for He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all, but the words are, “the Lord God is a sun.” Then, if God is mine, I have not only light, but I have the source of light. I have for my possession the central sun from whom all light comes to this world. We have heard of one who

received apples from a friend and was grateful, another was more highly favored, for his friend planted his garden with fruit trees. You and I have fruit from God and therein we are favored. Yes, but we have the Lord Himself, and thus we have the tree of life, and a perpetual supply most fresh, sweet, and constant. It is well to get a drink from a pitcher, but it is better to be like Isaac, who dwelt by the well, because then, if the pitcher becomes empty, there is an abiding supply from which to fill it. God is the source of all conceivable good, yes, inconceivable blessing lie in Him, and as such He belongs to His people. There might be light apart from the sun, but there could be no blessing apart from God, and on the other hand every sort of blessing is in God, and nothing is lacking in Him. He who is all good, and the source of all good, has made Himself our divine possession.

God is a sun. That is infinity of blessing. No man among us can conceive the measure of the light and heat of the sun. I suppose that calculations have been made by which the heat of the sun has been thought to be estimated, but the calculations must be beyond all ordinary numeration. Concerning the sun, its light, heat, and influence are beyond conception great. His light and heat have been continually streaming forth throughout many ages, and yet they are unabated to this hour, all that has come forth of it is far less than that which still remains. For all practical purposes the light and heat of the sun are infinite, and certainly in God all blessedness is absolutely infinite. There is no measuring it. We are lost. We can only say—"Oh, the depths of the love and goodness of God!" In being heirs of God we possess all in all. There is no bound to our blessedness in God.

Further, if God is called a sun, it is to let us know that we have obtained an immutability of blessedness, for He is "the Father of lights with whom is no variableness, neither shadow

of turning.” God is not love today and hate tomorrow. He says, “I am God, I change not.” There are said to be spots in the sun which diminish the light and heat which we receive, but there are no such spots in God. He shines on with the boundless fullness of His infinite love toward His people in Christ Jesus. “This God is our God forever and ever.” If we were to live as long as Methuselah we should find His love and power and wisdom to be the same, and we might confidently count upon being blessed thereby. What treasures of mercy do you and I possess in being able to say, “O God, You are my God!” We have the source of mercy, the infinity of mercy, and the immutability of mercy to be our own.

There much must be added concerning God as a sun—that He is forever communicating His light and heat and excellence to all who are about Him. I cannot conceive the sun shut up within itself. An unshining sun is a sun un-sunned. And a God that is not good and pouring forth His goodness has laid aside His deity. It is contrary to the very notion and idea of an infinitely good God for Him to restrain His goodness, and keep it back from His people. Thus then, beloved, you have not only God supremely good, but God abundantly giving Himself out to His people. He is not a spring shut up and a fountain sealed, but a springhead always flowing in winter and in summer. Nothing in God is reserved from His believing people. He gives Himself to you in all His fullness. All your needs shall be abundantly satisfied out of the riches of His goodness.

Has ever man such a task as I have in trying to speak of what is altogether unspeakable? Who shall fully extol this sun? Stand out in the open and look the sun full in the face for a little, and when blindness threatens you, learn how little we can know of the greater sun, the Sun of righteousness. And if thought fails, what shall speech do? How can it be possible for men to speak aright on such a text as this—“The Lord God is

a sun”? Go, you cold words, and be exhaled in the presence of this central fire! Yet I can show you enough to let you see that there is more than I can show you. I can say enough to let you know that there is a great deal more than I can say or than you can hear. To speak on this theme calls for some of those words which they speak in heaven in the full blaze of the glory, words such as mortal tongues cannot compass. Fully to set forth the wondrous height and depth of this promise might need that same Spirit who of old dictated it to the Psalmist, and placed it in the sacred page. “The Lord God is a sun”—here is blessedness in its fullness.

II. Now, secondly—and this is a deeply interesting point—this glorious word of God gives us **BLESSINGS IN THEIR COUNTERBALANCE.**

Let me explain myself. One blessing alone might scarcely be a blessing, for in being too great a blessing it might crush us. We may have too much of a good thing. We need some other gift to balance the single benediction. So notice here, “The Lord God is a sun *and shield*.” “Sun and shield” hang before my eyes like two golden scales. Each one adds value to the other. When God is a sun to His people, it may be He warms them into temporal prosperity with His bright beams, so that their goods increase, their body is in health, their trade succeeds, and their children are spared to them. They are grateful to God and joyful because of the blessings which He has bestowed upon them. He gives them their heart’s desire. He permits them to enjoy the blessing of this life as well as the promise of the life that is to come. Yet danger lurks here. You have heard of sunstroke, and prosperous persons are very apt to feel it. Our poor heads cannot bear the full beams of the sun of prosperity, we are smitten down with pride, or carelessness, or worldliness, or some other ill. It is trying for the soul to bask in the unclouded sun. Temporal gains are blessings in themselves, but

such is our poor nature that we do not make blessings of them, but we often make idols of them, and then they become curses. What a sweet mercy it is that when God prospers His children, and is a sun to them, He comes in at the same time and acts as their shield. The same God who is the pillar of fire to the hosts of Israel is also their pillar of cloud. Our hymn well puts it—

“He has been my joy in woe,
Cheered my heart when it was low,
And with warnings softly sad,
Calmed my heart when it was glad.”

When everything is bright with us the Lord knows how to sober His children’s spirits so that they use, but do not abuse, the things of this life. Even when they most abound with worldly joys, He makes His people feel that these are not their heart’s joy. He shades us from the noxious effect of wealth and content. He makes rich and adds no sorrow therewith. He suffers not the sun to smite us by day. Is not this a gracious style of counterbalance?

“The Lord God is a sun and shield,” too, when He shines upon us spiritually. Oh, how I rejoice in the sunny side of spiritual life. I do not always get it, but when I do reach it how happy I am. My heart is ready, like the gnats in the sunbeams, to dance up and down with intense delight. When God shines upon our soul, what gladness! What ecstasy! Then, truly, we would hardly change places with the angels, and as for kings and princes, we pity them. My God, lift up the light of Your countenance upon me, and I ask no more. It is heaven below. I know some of my brethren are often moping in the dungeon, but I guarantee you that when they do get out, they can dance with the nimblest, and they call for the merriest tunes too, for theirs is no, second-rate delight.

It is a great mercy that when God gives His people great spiritual joys He usually gives them a humbling sense of themselves at the same time. The shadow of their former depressions prevents their being unduly excited with their present joy, or else the forecast of another chastisement is given them, and this sobers them when they are inclined to be lifted up. The Lord has ways and means of letting His people be as happy as they can be, but yet not happier than they ought to be. He gives them grace so that they can be full of assurance, and yet full of holy fear, always rejoicing and yet never presuming, lifted up and yet lying low before the Lord. He gives them a well-mixed experience, and so forms an all-round character. While He is to them a sun producing rapid growth, He is also a shield forbidding their being burned up. He is their great Benefactor, but also their wise Chastener, and in both alike He blesses them.

Look at the text another way. When the sun shines upon a man he is made the more conspicuous by it. Suppose a hostile army to be down in the plain, and a soldier in our ranks is sent upon some errand by his captain. He must pass along the hillside. The sun shines upon him as he tries to make his way among the rocks and trees. Had it been night he could have moved safely, but now we fear that the enemy will surely pick him off, for the sunshine has made him conspicuous. He will need to be shielded from the many cruel eyes. Christian men are made conspicuous by the very fact of their possessing God's grace. You are the light of the world, and a light must be seen. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. If God gives you light, He means that light to be seen, and the more light He gives you the more conspicuous you will be. He is your sun, and He shines upon you, you reflect His light, and so become yourself a light, and in so doing you run necessary risks. The more brightly you shine the more will Satan and the world try to

quench your light. This, then, is your comfort. The Lord God who is a sun to you will also be a shield to you. Did He not say to Abraham, “Fear not, I am your shield, and your exceeding great reward”? He will defend you against the dangers of publicity, or even of popularity, and if He sets you upon a high place He will make your feet like the feet of a gazelle, so that you shall stand upon your high places.

Consider the text yet again, still keeping to this idea of counterbalance. “The Lord God is a sun,” and a sun manifests a thing, and this manifestation is not always a joy to us, but we need a defense with it. When the Lord shines in upon the heart of His people, they begin to see their sin, their guilt, their fall, their corruption, and then the Lord is a shield, and they are not overcome by the discovery. When they see the danger, at the same time they see the defense, and when they see the disease they see the remedy. It is a blessed thing not to see sin unless at the same time we see the Savior. It is a blessed thing not to have a sense of weakness in self unless it is accompanied with a sense of strength in the Lord. These two things most wisely balance each other, otherwise the revealing Spirit of God in showing us so much of our evil hearts, might almost drive us mad. If a man could see all his past sin, and all his present danger, and all the trials of his future life, he might lie down in despair, unless at the same time he was made to perceive that, if the Lord is a sun to reveal our danger, He is also a shield to secure our safety.

The Lord thus in His grace abounds toward us in all wisdom and prudence. He multiplies the value of the blessing by His wise way of dispensing it. He gives us the bitter medicine, but He also allots us the sweet cordial. He will sometimes chide, but He will not always do so. He will not give us too much of one blessing lest it spoil and breed overindulgence. He will give us another favor which shall make up a healthful mixture, yes,

thus He does with all things, so that they work together for our good.

Dwell on my text, and especially on this noteworthy point in it—blessings in their counterbalance.

III. Very briefly let me submit to you the third idea, namely, **BLESSINGS IN THEIR ORDER**, for there is a due and meet succession in my text. “The Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory.”

The Lord is to us first a sun and then a shield. Remember how David puts it elsewhere—“The Lord is my light and my salvation,” light first, salvation next. He does not save us in the dark; neither does He shield us in the dark. He gives enough sunlight to let us see the danger that we may appreciate the defense. We are not to shut our eyes and so find safety, but we are to see the evil and hide ourselves. Ought we not to be very grateful to God that He so orders our affairs? Ours is not a blind faith, receiving an unknown salvation from evils which are unperceived, this would be a poor form of life at best. No, the favor received is valued because its necessity is perceived. The heavenly sun lights up our souls and makes us see our ruin, and lie down in the dust of self-despair, and then it is that grace brings forth the shield which covers us, so that we are no more afraid, but rejoice in the glorious Lord as the God of our salvation.

Then notice the order of the next two things—grace and glory, not glory first. That could not be. We are not fit for it. Neither in body nor in soul are we fit for glory before grace. We could not possibly receive glory while we are sinners, for a glorified sinner would be a strange sight. Grace must first blot out our sin. To take the rebel from the prison and put him among the children would be dangerous work unless his crime was pardoned and he was reconciled to his king. Grace must come in to change the nature. We could not enter glory or enjoy

it by any possibility while we are sinful at heart. An unregenerate heart could not enter into the joy of the Lord. Only the pure in heart can see God, carnal eyes are blind to spiritual things. Grace must renew us or glory cannot receive us. Grace must change, regenerate, sanctify, or we cannot take our places among the perfected ones. Glory without grace would be mockery. The prepared place would be no heaven if the people were not also prepared.

As in this case there is order, you will find it so in all the arrangements of the Lord's house. One blessing is a steppingstone to another. The holy leads on to the holiest, first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. The Lord gives mercies in succession, and He never gives you number two till you have been qualified for it by receiving number one. "They go from strength to strength." He gives life and then life more abundantly. First grace, and then, grace upon grace. God abounds towards us in all wisdom and prudence, leading us, as we do our boys, from their first-class books up to their classics, and taking care to ground us in each successive ascent of knowledge. Step by step we rise towards God, until at last we shall see the Savior's face and shall be like Him.

Blessings in their order. Treasure this up, for it may be a ground of comfort to you. When you get clamoring for number seven, it may, perhaps, calm you a little if you remember that you must first have number six. Plod on step by step. Walk without fainting from one stage to another, and you shall surely come unto the Mountain of God.

IV. Fourthly, and again briefly, **BLESSINGS IN PREPARATION AND BLESSINGS IN MATURITY.** "The Lord will give grace and glory." Grace is glory in the bud, you shall see the rod of Aaron full of blooming graces, but this is not all—glory is grace in ripe fruit, the rod shall bear ripe almonds.

The Lord will give you both, the dawn and the noon, the Alpha and the Omega, grace and glory.

Let us be very grateful that God deals in preparatory mercies. If He had provided heaven, and we were to make ourselves fit for it, we should never get there. Yes, and there are many stages of spiritual experience which are not to be attained unless God gives us preliminary educating grace to come at them. The blessing is that all that is necessary to reach any gracious attainment is as much promised as the blessing itself.

Is it so, my poor friend, that you cannot this morning lay hold of a promise? You are such a babe in grace. Well, our heavenly Father has an infant class in His school and a nursery in His house. He will teach you as a child, and give you a child's portion upon which you shall feed, and by which you shall grow. Do not be afraid to ask of God the beginnings of things. I know that sometimes in our prayers we feel that we are so blameworthy for our stupidity that we hardly dare ask to be taught the simple truths which we ought to know, but we must not give way to this proud humility, we must beg even to be taught our A B C's. Suppose we need to be helped to overcome an irritable temper, let us not be ashamed to acknowledge the need, but confess it and pray for help. Do we need grace to bear our little daily trials? Then let us seek everyday grace. Ask for a babe's blessings, for God is prepared to give them. Does He not say, "I taught Ephraim to go, taking them by their arms"? "The Lord will give grace and glory."

Brethren, we shall need much training to fit us to sing among the choristers above. Discords and false notes abound, and we must be tutored out of them into a richness of sweet tones and ordered harmonies. If we look into ourselves carefully we shall be shocked with the sight of our own unworthiness to mingle with perfect beings. I do not know how

you feel about yourselves, but I grow worse and worse in my own judgment. I hope that I am more sanctified in many respects, but I am also more conscious of my need of fuller sanctification. The fact is that the more light a soul obtains, the more it perceives its darkness and laments it. The more God makes you holy, the more unholy you will judge yourself to be. No man groans so deeply, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” as the man who is nearest to complete deliverance from all evil. The last relics of sin are more horrible to the godly man than the full empire of sin to the newly awakened. Even the very thought of sin, the flitting of it through his soul like a bird across the sky, becomes a calamity to the full-grown saint, and he cries out against it. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” He who glories that he is perfectly sanctified must either have lowered the standard of holiness or else he has an exaggerated conceit of his own excellence. He who does not daily struggle against sin is in darkness and error, and I fear the life of God is not in his soul. In proportion as God has dealt with a man he will cry out for a something yet beyond him, and press forward to that which is before. Oh, how I long to be perfectly rid of sin and of every liability to fall into it. And here is the mercy—that the Lord will give grace. All the grace that is needed to make you absolutely perfect God will bestow. He will reveal His righteousness from faith to faith, and we shall go from grace to grace. Faith shall lead on to full assurance, hope shall brighten into expectancy, love shall flame into burning zeal, and so we shall rise on eagles’ wings from grace to glory; not only the light of the lamp in its full brilliance, but the wick and the oil and the trimming, the Lord will give.

Furthermore, the Lord will not deny you the maturity, namely, glory. He who gives us breakfast in grace will cause us to sup with Him in glory.

Now, here I am altogether beaten. What shall I say of glory? What do I know of it? Matthew Wilks once said, “Man is the glory of the world; the soul is the glory of man; grace is the glory of the soul; and heaven is the glory of grace.” This is true, but still what do any of us know of glory in its heavenly sense? The Lord will give us nothing less than glory. We deserve shame, He will give us glory. We deserve misery, but He will give us glory. We deserve condemnation, but He will give us glory. We deserve death and hell, but He will give us glory.

What is glory? He that has been in heaven five minutes can tell you better than the sagest divine that lives, and yet he could not tell you. No, the angels could not tell you, you would not understand them. What is glory? You must enjoy it to know it. Glory is not merely rest, happiness, wealth, safety; it is honor, victory, immortality, triumph. You know what men call “glory” here below. The people climb to the housetops and throng the streets, and sound the clarions because a conqueror has returned from war and brings with him huge spoils. See how he stands erect, drawn in his chariot by milk-white steeds. Follow him up the Via Sacra to the Capitol at Rome. Men count him happy because he is surrounded with glory. What is this glory? Smoke, noise, dust, and oblivion, that is all. But glory as the Lord uses the term, what is it? It is that which surrounds Himself, for He is the King of glory. It is that which crowns every attribute, for we read of the glory of His power and the glory of His grace. It is the outcome of all His plans and thoughts and works, for in all things He is glorified. It is that which His dear Son inherits, for He has entered into His glory. We shall be with Him where He is, and shall behold His glory. Yes, it is of this unutterable thing that we shall partake, and that so soon! “Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

V. Now, fifthly and finally, **BLESSINGS IN THEIR UNIVERSALITY.** I have noticed that lawyers, who will always

go into particulars as much as they can in their deeds—an excellent method of adding to their fees—yet usually are obliged to sum up with a general clause which includes all they have said and all they ought to have said. They use some sweeping final sentence to comprehend all the mentionable and unmentionables, all that can be remembered and all that might be forgotten. Now, the last part of my text is of that character—“No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.” Is there some good thing which does not come to us by the Lord’s being our sun? We shall not lose on that account. Is there another good thing which cannot be included in God’s being our shield? We shall not be deprived of that. Is there some good thing that cannot be comprehended in grace? I cannot imagine what it can be, but if there is such a thing, we shall not miss even that. Is there some good thing that is not comprehended even in glory? Well, it does not matter, we shall have it, for here stands the boundless promise—“No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.”

“Well,” says someone, “but God has denied me many good things!” Yes, then they would not be good things to you. What has God done to you, then? “He has made me to be sickly in body, He has caused me to be poor, and I am tried in many ways.” In this He has fulfilled His word, that no good thing should be withheld from you. I have known a father who boasted that he never laid a hand on his children by way of chastising them. I sometimes wished that he had done so, for his children were a sad plague to all who called at the house. Now, that father was withholding a good thing from his children— a touch of the birch would have been most wholesome. Our heavenly Father never says of any of His elect, “I never laid a hand upon them,” but it is written, “As many as I love I rebuke and chasten.” God had one Son without sin, but He never had a son without chastisement. O you who are

tried and afflicted, the Lord has not withheld from you the blessing of His rod. Accept trials from God, and believe that they are tokens of His love. If there is anything you wish for and cannot get it from God, then, depend upon it, it would not be a good thing for you. If there is any apparently evil thing which comes to you plenteously, and you would gladly avoid it, depend upon it, it really is a good thing or else the Lord would not have sent it to you.

“Alas,” cries one, “there are many good things which I have not received.” Whose fault is that? What does the text say? It does not say, “I will force all My children to enjoy every good thing.” No, but, “No good thing will He withhold.” There are thousands of mercies that we do not enjoy, not because they are withheld, but because we do not take them. We are not straitened in God, but in ourselves. We are empty because we do not accept the fullness of Christ. If we were to be introduced into some of the depots in London that are full of articles most rich and rare, and the owners were to say, “Now, take whatever you please,” we should help ourselves with a degree of liberality. But when the Lord takes us into the storehouses of His grace, we have not faith enough to ask for large things. We might have ten times as much—ten thousand times as much—if we would. Many of God’s people are pining on a pittance when they might feast in plenty. They are eating the coarsest meal, and wearing the roughest garment—I mean spiritually—and going about sighing and crying, and doubting and fearing, and all the while there is the bread of heaven on the table for them, and the robe of Christ’s righteousness is prepared for them to wear. They might dwell at heaven’s gate, but they condemn themselves to the dunghill.

Come, brothers and sisters, let us change all this, and if the Lord has said, “No good thing will I withhold,” let us put Him to the test. Among other things, let us ask Him to give us more

joy in the Lord—a fuller assurance and confidence in Him, and He will give it to us. Do not let us be poor by self-inflicted poverty, but let us rise to the riches which are presented to us in this blessed text. I wish I knew how to preach from it, but pray take an hour this afternoon, and do with the text as the cow does with the grass when she has been round the meadow and satisfied herself. She lies down and chews the cud. If you will ruminate by meditation you will find more in the text than I shall ever be able to bring out of it. May the Lord feed you upon this choice portion, for Christ's sake. Amen.

1660 PERPETUITY OF THE LAW – MATT. 5:18

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, May 21, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot
or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled.

— Matthew 5:18

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Matthew 5:17-37]

IT HAS BEEN SAID that he who understands the two covenants is a theologian, and this is, no doubt, true. I may also say that the man who knows the relative positions of the law and of the gospel has the keys of the situation in the matter of doctrine. The relationship of the law to myself, and how it condemns me, the relationship of the gospel to myself, and how if I am a believer it justifies me—these are two points which every Christian man should clearly understand. He should not “see men as trees walking” in this department, or else he may cause himself great sorrow, and fall into errors which will be grievous to his heart and injurious to his life. To form a mangle-mangle of law and gospel, is to teach that which is neither law nor gospel, but the opposite of both. May the Spirit of God be our teacher, and may the Word of God be our lesson book, and then we shall not err.

Very great mistakes have been made about the law. Not long ago there were those about us who affirmed that the law

is utterly abrogated and abolished, and they openly taught that believers were not bound to make the moral law the rule of their lives. What would have been sin in other men they counted not to be sin in themselves. From such Antinomianism as that may God deliver us. We are not under the law as the method of salvation, but we delight to see the law in the hand of Christ, and desire to obey the Lord in all things. Others have been met with who have taught that Jesus mitigated and softened down the law, and they have in effect said that the perfect law of God was too hard for imperfect beings, and therefore God has given us a milder and easier rule. These tread dangerously upon the verge of terrible error, although we believe that they are little aware of it. Alas, we have met with authors who have gone much further than this, and have railed at the law. Oh, the hard words that I have sometimes read against the holy law of God! How very unlike those which the apostle used when he said, “The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.” How different from the reverent spirit which made him say— “I delight in the law of God after the inward man.” You know how David loved the law of God, and sang its praises all through the longest of the Psalms. The heart of every real Christian is most reverent towards the law of the Lord. It is perfect, no, it is perfection itself. We believe that we shall never have reached perfection till we are perfectly conformed to it. A sanctification which stops short of perfect conformity to the law cannot truthfully be called perfect sanctification, for every lack of exact conformity to the perfect law is sin. May the Spirit of God help us while, in imitation of our Lord Jesus, we endeavor to magnify the law.

I gather from our text two things upon which I shall speak at this time. The first is that *the law of God is perpetual*, “Till Heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass

from the law.” The meaning is that even in the least point it must abide till it is all fulfilled. Secondly, we perceive that *the law must be fulfilled*. Not “one jot or one tittle shall pass from the law, till all is fulfilled.” He who came to bring in the gospel dispensation here asserts that He has not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it.

I. First—THE LAW OF GOD MUST BE PERPETUAL.

There is no abrogation of it, nor amendment of it. It is not to be toned down or adjusted to our fallen condition, but every one of the Lord's righteous judgments abides forever. I would urge three reasons which will establish this teaching.

In the first place *our Lord Jesus declares that He did not come to abolish it*. His words are most exact, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.” And Paul tells us with regard to the gospel, “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yes, we establish the law” (Rom. 3:31). The gospel is the means of the firm establishment and vindication of the law of God.

Jesus did not come to change the law, but He came to explain it, and that very fact shows that it remains, for there is no need to explain that which is abrogated. Upon one particular point in which there happened to be a little ceremonialism involved, namely, the keeping of the Sabbath, our Lord enlarged, and showed that the Jewish idea was not the true one. The Pharisees forbade even the doing of works of necessity and mercy, such as rubbing ears of corn to satisfy hunger, and healing the sick. Our Lord Jesus showed that it was not at all according to the mind of God to forbid these things. In straining over the letter and carrying an outward observance to excess, they had missed the spirit of the Sabbath law, which suggested works of piety such as truly hallow the day. He showed that Sabbatic rest was not mere inaction, and He said, “My Father works hitherto, and I work.” He pointed to the

priests who labored hard at offering sacrifices, and said of them, “The priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless.” They were doing divine service, and were within the law. To meet the popular error He took care to do some of His grandest miracles upon the Sabbath, and though this excited great wrath against Him, as though He were a law-breaker, yet He did it on purpose that they might see that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath, and that it is meant to be a day for doing that which honors God and blesses men. O, that, men knew how to keep the spiritual Sabbath by a ceasing from all servile work, and from all work done for self. The rest of faith is the true Sabbath, and the service of God is the most acceptable hallowing of the day. Oh that the day were wholly spent in serving God and doing good! The sum of our Lord’s teaching was that works of necessity, works of mercy, and works of piety are lawful on the Sabbath. He did explain the law in that point and in others, yet that explanation did not alter the command, but only removed the rust of tradition which had settled upon it. By thus explaining the law He confirmed it, He could not have meant to abolish it or He would not have needed to expound it.

In addition to explaining it the Master went further, He pointed out its spiritual character. This the Jews had not observed. They thought, for instance, that the command “You shall not kill” simply forbade murder and manslaughter. But the Savior showed that anger without cause violates the law, and that hard words and cursing, and all other displays of enmity and malice, are forbidden by the commandment. They knew that they might not commit adultery, but it did not enter into their minds that a lascivious desire would be an offense against the precept till the Savior said, “He that looks upon a woman to lust after her commits adultery with her already in his heart.” He showed that the thought of evil is sin, that an

unclean imagination pollutes the heart, and that a wanton wish is guilt in the eyes of the Most High. Assuredly this was no abrogation of the law of God; it was a wonderful exhibition of its far-reaching sovereignty and of its searching character. The Pharisees fancied that if they kept their hands, their feet, and their tongues, all was done, but Jesus showed that thought, imagination, desire, memory, everything, must be brought into subjection to the will of God or else the law was not fulfilled. What a searching and humbling doctrine is this! If the law of the Lord reaches to the inward parts, who among us can by nature abide its judgment? Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. The ten commandments are full of meaning—meaning which many seem to ignore. For instance, many a man will allow in and around his house inattention to the rules of health and sanitary precaution, but it does not occur to him that he is trampling on the command—“You shall not kill.” Yet this rule forbids our doing anything which may cause injury to our neighbor’s health, and so deprive him of life. Many a deadly manufactured article, many an ill-ventilated shop, many a business with hours of excessive length, is a standing breach of this command. Shall I say less of drinks, which lead so speedily to disease and death, and crowd our cemeteries with untimely graves? So, too, in reference to another precept, some persons will repeat songs and stories which are suggestive of uncleanness—I wish that this were not as common as it is. Do they not know that an unchaste word, a double meaning, a sly hint of lust, all comes under the command, “You shall not commit adultery”? It is so according to the teaching of our Lord Jesus. Oh, talk not to me about our Lord’s having brought in a milder law because man could not keep the Decalogue, for He has done nothing of the kind. “His fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor.” “Who may abide the day of His coming? for He is like a

refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap." Let us not dare to dream that God had given us a perfect law which we poor creatures could not keep, and that therefore He has corrected His legislature, and sent His Son to put us under a relaxed discipline. Nothing of the sort; the Lord Jesus Christ has, on the contrary, shown how intimately the law surrounds and enters into our inward parts, so as to convict us of sin within even if we seem clean on the outside. Ah me, this law is high, I cannot attain to it. It surrounds me everywhere, it tracks me to my bed and my board, and it follows my steps and marks my ways wherever I may be. No moment does it cease to, govern and demand obedience. O God, I am everywhere condemned, for everywhere Your law reveals to me my serious deviations from the way of righteousness and shows me how far short I come of Your glory. Have pity on Your servant, for I fly to the gospel which has done for me what the law could never do—

“To see the law by Christ fulfilled,
And hear His pardoning voice,
Changes a slave into a child,
And duty into choice.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ, in addition to explaining the law and pointing out its spiritual character, also unveiled its living essence, for when one asked Him “Which is the great commandment in the law?” He said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it; You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” In other words, He has told us, “All the law is fulfilled in this, you shall love.” There is the pith and marrow of it. Does any man say to me, “You see, then, instead of the

ten commandments, we have received the two commandments, and these are much easier.” I answer that this reading of the law is not in the least easier. Such a remark implies a lack of thought and experience. Those two precepts comprehend the ten at their fullest extent, and cannot be regarded as the erasure of a jot or tittle of them. Whatever difficulties surround the ten commands, are equally found in the two, which are their sum and substance. If you love God with all your heart you must keep the first table, and if you love your neighbor as yourself you must keep the second table. If any suppose that the law of love is an adaptation of the moral law to man’s fallen condition, they greatly err. I can only say that the supposed adaptation is no more adapted to us than the original law. If there could be conceived to be any difference in difficulty, it might be easier to keep the ten than the two, for if we go no deeper than the letter, the two are the more exacting, since they deal with the heart, and soul, and mind. The ten commands mean all that the two express. But if we forget this, and only look at the wording of them, I say, it is harder for a man to love God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind, and with all his strength, and his neighbor as himself than it would be merely to abstain from killing, stealing and false witness. Christ has not, therefore, abrogated or at all moderated the law to meet our helplessness. He has left it in all its sublime perfection, as it always must be left, and He has pointed out how deep are its foundations, how elevated are its heights, how measureless are its length and breadth. Like the laws of the Medes and Persians, God’s commands cannot be altered; we are saved by another method.

To show that He never meant to abrogate the law, our Lord Jesus has embodied all its commands in His own life. In His own person there was a nature which was perfectly conformed to the law of God, and as was His nature, such was

His life. He could say, “Which of you convicts Me of sin?” And again, “I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.” I may not say that He was scrupulously careful to keep the law. I will not put it so, for there was no tendency in Him to do otherwise. He was so perfect and pure; so infinitely good, and so complete in His agreement and communion with the Father, that He in all things carried out the Father’s will. The Father said of Him, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear you Him.” Point out, if you possibly can, any way in which Christ has violated the law or left it unfulfilled. There was never an unclean thought or rebellious desire in His soul. He had nothing to regret or to retract; it could not be that He should err. He was thrice tempted in the wilderness, and the enemy had the impertinence even to suggest idolatry, but He instantly overthrew the adversary. The prince of this world came to Him, but he found nothing in Him—

“My dear Redeemer and my Lord,
I read my duty in Your Word.
But in Your life the law appears
Drawn out in living characters.”

Now, if that law had been too high and too hard, Christ would not have exhibited it in His life. But as our exemplar He would have set forth that milder form of law which is supposed by some theologians He came to introduce. Inasmuch as our Leader and Exemplar has exhibited to us in His life a perfect obedience to the sacred commands in their undiminished grandeur, I gather that He means it to be the model of our conversation. Our Lord has not taken off a single point or pinnacle from that up-towering alp of perfection. He said at the first, “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Your will, O My God; yes, Your law is within

My heart,” and well has He justified the writing of the volume of the book. “God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law,” and being for our sakes under the law He obeyed it to the fullest, so that now, “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes.”

Once more, that the Master did not come to alter the law is clear, because after having embodied it in His life, He willingly gave Himself up to bear its penalty, though He had never broken it, bearing the penalty for us, even as it is written, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.” “All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” If the law had demanded more of us than it ought to have done, would the Lord Jesus have rendered to it the penalty which resulted from its too severe demands? I am sure He would not. But because the law asked only what it ought to ask—namely perfect obedience, and exacted of the transgressor only what it ought to exact, namely, death, as the penalty for sin—death under divine wrath, therefore the Savior went to the cross, and there bore our sins and purged them once and for all. He was crushed beneath the load of our guilt, and cried, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death,” and at last when He had borne—

“All that incarnate God could bear,
With strength enough, but none to spare,”

He bowed His head and said, “It is finished.” Our Lord Jesus Christ gave a greater vindication to the law by dying, because it had been broken, than all the lost in hell can ever give by their miseries, for their suffering is never complete, their debt is never paid. But He has borne all that was due from His people and the law is defrauded of nothing. By His death

He has vindicated the honor of God's moral government, and made it just for Him to be merciful. When the lawgiver Himself submits to the law, when the sovereign Himself bears the extreme penalty of that law, then is the justice of God set upon such a glorious high throne that all admiring worlds must wonder at it. If, therefore, it is clearly proven, that Jesus was obedient to the law, even to the extent of death, He certainly did not come to abolish or abrogate it, and if *He* did not remove it, who can do so? If He declares that He came to establish it, who shall overthrow it?

But, secondly, the law of God must be perpetual *from its very nature*, for does it not strike you the moment you think of it, that right must always be right, truth must always be true, and purity must always be pure? Before the ten commandments were published at Sinai, there was still that same law of right and wrong laid upon men by the necessity of their being God's creatures. Right was always right, before a single command had been committed to words. When Adam was in the garden it was always right that he should love his Maker, and it would always have been wrong that he should have been at cross-purposes with his God. And it does not matter what happens in this world, or what changes take place in the universe, it never can be right to lie, or to commit adultery, or murder, or steal, or to worship an idol god. I will not say that the principles of right and wrong are as absolutely self-existent as God, but I do say that I cannot grasp the idea of God Himself as existing apart from His being always holy and always true, so that the very idea of right and wrong seems to me to be necessarily permanent, and cannot possibly be shifted. You cannot bring right, down to a lower level, it must be where it always is, right is right eternally, and cannot be wrong. You cannot lift up wrong and make it somewhat right, it must be wrong while the world stands. Heaven and earth may pass away, but not the

smallest letter or accent of the moral law can possibly change. In spirit the law is eternal.

Suppose for a moment that it were possible to temper and tone down the law, where would it be? I confess I do not know and cannot imagine. If it is perfectly holy, how can it be altered except by being made imperfect? Would you wish for that? Could you worship the God of an imperfect law? Can it ever be true that God, by way of favoring us, has put us under an imperfect law? Would that be a blessing or a curse? It is said by some that man cannot keep a perfect law, and God does not demand that he should. Certain modern theologians have taught this, I hope, by inadvertence. Has God issued an imperfect law? It is the first imperfect thing I ever heard of His making. Does it come to this that, after all, the gospel is a proclamation that God is going to be satisfied with obedience to a mutilated law? God forbid. I say, better that we perish than that His perfect law perish. Terrible as it is, it lies at the foundation of the peace of the universe, and must be honored at all hazards. That gone, all goes. When the power of the Holy Spirit convinced me of sin, I felt such a solemn awe of the law of God, that I remember well, when I lay crashed beneath it as a condemned sinner, I yet admired and glorified the law. I could not have wished that perfect law to be altered for me. Rather did I feel that, if my soul were sent to the lowest hell, yet God was to be extolled for His justice and His law held in honor for its perfectness. I would not have had it altered even to save my soul. Brethren, the law of the Lord must stand, for it is perfect, and therefore has in it no element of decay or change.

The law of God is no more than God might most righteously ask of us. If God were about to give us a more tolerant law, it would be an admission on His part that He asked too much at first. Can that be supposed? Was there, after all, some justification for the statement of the wicked and

slothful servant when he said, “I feared you, because you are an austere man”? It cannot be. For God to alter His law would be an admission that He made a mistake at first, that He put poor imperfect man (we are often hearing that said) under too rigorous a regime, and therefore He is now prepared to abate His claims, and make them more reasonable. It has been said that man’s moral inability to keep the perfect law exempts him from the duty of doing so. This is very specious, but it is utterly false. Man’s inability is not of the kind which removes responsibility; it is moral, not physical. Never fall into the error that moral inability will be an excuse for sin. What? When a man becomes such a liar that he cannot speak the truth, is he therefore exempted from the duty of truthfulness? If your servant owes you a day’s labor, is he free from the duty because he has made himself so drunk that he cannot serve you? Is a man freed from a debt by the fact that he has squandered the money, and therefore cannot pay it? Is a lustful man free to indulge his passions because he cannot understand the beauty of chastity? This is dangerous doctrine. The law is a just one, and man is bound by it though his sin has rendered him incapable of doing so.

The law, moreover, demands no more than is good for us. There is not a single commandment of God’s law but what is meant to be a kind of danger signal such as we put up upon the ice when it is too thin to bear. Each commandment does, as it were, say to us, “Dangerous.” It is never for a man’s good to do what God forbids him. It is never for man’s real and ultimate happiness to leave undone anything that God commands him. The wisest directions for spiritual health, and for the avoidance of evil, are those directions which are given us concerning right and wrong in the law of God. Therefore it is not possible that there should be any alteration, for it would not be for our good.

I should like to say to any brother who thinks that God has put us under an altered rule, “Which particular part of the law is it that God has relaxed?” Which precept do you feel free to break? Are you delivered from the command which forbids stealing? My dear sir, you may be a capital theologian, but I should lock up my spoons when you call at my house. Is it the command about adultery which you think is removed? Then I could not recommend your being admitted into any decent society. Is the law as to killing softened down? Then I had rather have your room than your company. Which law is it that God has exempted you from? That law of worshipping Him only? Do you propose to have another god? Do you intend to make engraved images? The fact is that when we come to details, we cannot afford to lose a single link of this wonderful golden chain, which is perfect in every part as well as perfect as a whole. The law is absolutely complete, and you can neither add to it nor take from it. “Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if you commit no adultery, yet if you kill, you have become a transgressor of the law.” If then, no part of it can be taken down it must stand, and stand forever.

A third reason I will give why the law must be perpetual is that *to suppose it altered is most dangerous*. To take away from the law its perpetuity is first of all to take away from it its power to convict of sin. Is it so, that I, being an imperfect creature, am not expected to keep a perfect law? Then it follows that I do not sin when I break the law. And if all that is required of me is that I am to do according to the best of my knowledge and ability, then I have a very convenient rule indeed, and most men will take care to adjust it so as to give themselves as much latitude as possible. By removing the law you have done away with sin, for sin is the transgression of the law. And where there

is no law there is no transgression. When you have done away with sin, you may as well have done away with the Savior and with salvation, for they are by no means necessary. When you have reduced sin to a minimum, what need is there of that great and glorious salvation which Jesus Christ has come to bring into the world? Brethren, we must have none of this. It is evidently a way of mischief.

By lowering the law, you weaken its power in the hands of God as a convincer of sin. “By the law is the knowledge of sin.” It is the looking glass which shows us our spots, and that is a most useful thing, though nothing but the gospel can wash them away—

“My hopes of heaven were firm and bright,
But since the precept came
With a convincing power and light,
I find how vile I am.
My guilt appeared but small before,
Till terribly I saw
How perfect, holy, just and pure
Was Your eternal law.
Then felt my soul the heavy load,
My sins revived again,
I had provoked a dreadful God,
And all my hopes were slain.”

It is only a pure and perfect law that the Holy Spirit can use in order to show us our depravity and sinfulness. Lower the law and you dim the light by which man perceives his guilt. This is a very serious loss to the sinner rather than a gain, for it lessens the likelihood of his conviction and conversion.

You have also taken away from the law its power to shut us up to the faith of Christ. What is the law of God for? Is it

for us to keep in order to be saved by it? Not at all. It is sent in order to show us that we cannot be saved by works, and to shut us up to be saved by grace, but if you make out that the law is altered so that a man can keep it, you have left him his old legal hope, and he is sure to cling to it. You need a perfect law that shuts man right up to hopelessness apart from Jesus, puts him into an iron cage and locks him up, and offers him no escape but by faith in Jesus. Then he begins to cry, “Lord, save me by grace, for I perceive that I cannot be saved by my own works.” This is how Paul describes it to the Galatians, “The Scripture has concluded all are under sin that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Therefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” I say you have deprived the gospel of its most able auxiliary when you have set aside the law. You have taken away from it the schoolmaster that is to bring men to Christ. No, it must stand, and stand in all its terrors, to drive men away from self-righteousness and constrain them to fly to Christ. They will never accept grace till they tremble before a just and holy law. Therefore the law serves a most necessary and blessed purpose, and it must not be removed from its place.

To alter the law is to leave us without any law at all. A sliding scale of duty is an immoral invention, fatal to the principles of law. If each man is to be accepted because he does his best, we are all doing our best. Is there anybody that is not? If we take their words for it, all our fellow men are doing as well as they can, considering their imperfect natures. Even the harlot in the streets has some righteousness—she is not quite so far gone as others. Have you ever heard of the bandit who committed many murders, but who felt that he had been doing his best because he never killed anybody on a Friday? Self-

righteousness builds itself a nest, even in the worst character. This is the man's talk— "Really, if you knew me, you would say I have been a good fellow to do as well as I have. Consider what a poor, fallen creature I am, what strong passions were born in me, what temptations to vice beset me, and you will not blame me much. After all, I dare say God is as satisfied with me as with many who are a great deal better, because I had so few advantages." Yes, you have shifted the standard, and every man will now do that which is right in his own eyes and claim to be doing his best. If you shift the standard pound weight or the bushel measure, you will certainly never get full weight or measurement again. There will be no standard to go by, and each man will do his best with his own pounds and bushels. If the standard is tampered with, you have taken away the foundation upon which trade is conducted, and it is the same in soul matters—abolish the best rule that ever can be, even God's own law, and there is no rule left worthy of the name. What a fine opening this leaves for vain-glory. No wonder that men talk of perfect sanctification if the law has been lowered. There is nothing at all remarkable in our getting up to the rule if it is conveniently lowered for us. I believe I shall be perfectly sanctified when I keep God's law without omission or transgression, but not till then. If any man says that he is perfectly sanctified because he has come up to a modified law of his own, I am glad to know what he means, for I have no longer any discussion with him. I see nothing wonderful in his attainment. Sin is my need of conformity to the law of God, and until we are perfectly conformed to that law in all its spiritual length and breadth it is idle for us to talk about perfect sanctification. No man is perfectly clean till he accepts absolute purity as the standard by which he is to be judged. So long as there is in us any coming short of the perfect law we are not perfect. What a humbling truth this is! The law shall not pass

away, but it must be fulfilled. This truth must be maintained, for if it goes, our tackling is loose, we cannot well strengthen the mast, the ship goes all to pieces, she becomes a total wreck. The gospel itself would be destroyed could you destroy the law. To tamper with the law is to trifle with the gospel. "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all is fulfilled."

II. I come to show, secondly, that **THE LAW MUST BE FULFILLED**. I hope there are some in this place who are saying, "*We* cannot fulfill it." That is exactly where I want to bring you. Salvation by the works of the law must be felt to be impossible by every man who would be saved. We must learn that salvation is of grace through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord, and not by our own doings or feelings. But this is a doctrine no one will receive till he has learned the previous truth that salvation by the works of the law can never come to any man born of woman. Yet the law must be fulfilled. Many will say with Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" I answer, the law is fulfilled in Christ, and by faith we receive the fruit thereof.

First, as I have already said, the law is fulfilled in the matchless *sacrifice of Jesus Christ*. If a man has broken a law, what does the law do with him? It says, "I must be honored. You have broken my command which was sanctioned by the penalty of death. Inasmuch as you did not honor me by obedience, but dishonored me by transgression, you must die." Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the great covenant representative of His people, their second Adam, stood forward on the behalf of all who are in Him, and presented Himself as a victim to divine justice. Since His people were guilty of death, He, as their covenant head, came under death in their place. It was a glorious thing that such representative death was possible, and it was only so because of the original constitution of the race as springing from a common father, and placed under a single

head. Inasmuch as our fall was by one Adam, it was possible for us to be raised by another Adam. “As in Adam all died, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” It became possible for God, upon the principle of representation, to allow substitution. Our first fall was not by our personal fault, but through the failure of our representative, and now in comes our second and grander representative, the Son of God, and He sets us free, not by our honoring the law, but by His doing so. He came under the law by His birth, and being found as a man loaded with the guilt of all His people, He was visited with its penalty. The law lifts its bloody axe, and it smites our glorious Head that we may go free. It is the Son of God that keeps the law by dying, the just for the unjust. “The soul that sins, it shall die”—there is death demanded, and in Christ death is presented. Life for life is rendered, an infinitely precious life instead of the poor lives of men. Jesus has died, and so the law has been fulfilled by the endurance of its penalty, and being fulfilled, its power to condemn and punish the believer has passed away.

Secondly, the law has been fulfilled again for us by Christ in His life. I have already gone over this, but I want to establish you in it. Jesus Christ as our head and representative, came into the world for the double purpose of bearing the penalty and at the same time keeping the law. One of His main designs in coming to earth was “to bring in perfect righteousness.” “As by the disobedience of one many were made sinners, so by the righteousness of one shall many be made righteous.” The law requires a perfect life, and he that believes in Jesus Christ presents to the law a perfect life, which he has made his own by faith. It is not his own life, but Christ is made of God unto us righteousness, even to us who are one with Him. “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes.” That which Jesus did is counted as though we did it, and because He was righteous God sees us in Him and counts us

righteous upon the principle of substitution and representation. Oh, how blessed it is to put on this robe and to wear it, and so to stand before the Most High in a better righteousness than His law demanded, for that demanded the perfect righteousness of a creature, but we put on the absolute righteousness of the Creator Himself. And what can the law ask more? It is written, “In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely, and this is the name with which He shall be called—The Lord our righteousness.” “The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness’ sake: He will magnify the law and make it honorable.”

Yes, but that is not all. The law has to be fulfilled in us personally in a spiritual and gospel sense. “Well,” you say, “but how can that be?” I reply in the words of our apostle, “What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh,” Christ has done and is doing by the Holy Spirit, “that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.” Regeneration is a work by which the law is fulfilled, for when a man is born again there is placed in him a new nature, which loves the law of God and is perfectly conformed to it. The new nature which God implants in every believer at the time he is born again is incapable of sin; it cannot sin, for it is born of God. That new nature is the offspring of the eternal Father, and the Spirit of God dwells in it, and with it, and strengthens it. It is light, it is purity, it is according to the Scripture the “living and incorruptible seed which lives and abides forever.” If incorruptible, it is sinless, for sin is corruption, and corrupts everything that it touches. The apostle Paul, when describing his inward conflicts, showed that he himself, his real and best self, did keep the law, for he says, “So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God” (Rom. 7:25). He consented to the law that it was good, which showed that he was on the side of the law. And though sin that

dwelt in his members led him into transgression, yet his new nature did not allow it, but hated and loathed it, and cried out against it as one in bondage. The newborn soul delights in the law of the Lord, and there is within it a quenchless life which aspires after absolute perfection, and will never rest till it pays to God perfect obedience and comes to be like God Himself.

This which is begun in regeneration is continued and grows till it ultimately arrives at absolute perfection. That will be seen in the world to come, and oh, what a fulfillment of the law will be there! The law will admit no man to heaven till he is perfectly conformed to it, but every believer shall be in that perfect condition. Our nature shall be refined from all its dross and be as pure gold. It will be our delight in heaven to be holy. There will be nothing about us then to kick against a single commandment. We shall there know in our own hearts the glory and excellence of the divine will, and our will shall run in the same channel. We shall not imagine that the precepts are rigorous; they will be our own will as truly as they are God's will. Nothing which God has commanded however much of self-denial it requires now will require any self-denial from us then. Holiness will be our element, our delight. Our nature will be entirely conformed to the nature and mind of God as to holiness and goodness, and then the law will be fulfilled in us, and we shall stand before God, having washed our robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. And at the same time being ourselves without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. Then shall the law of the Lord have eternal honor from our immortal being. Oh, how we shall rejoice in it! We delight in it after the inward man now, but then we shall delight in it as to our risen bodies which shall be charmed to be instruments of righteousness unto God forever and ever. No appetite of those risen bodies, no want and no necessity of them shall then lead the soul astray, but our whole body, soul, and spirit shall be

perfectly conformed unto the divine mind. Let us long and pant for this. We shall never attain it except by believing in Jesus. Perfect holiness will never be reached by the works of the law, for works cannot change the nature. But by faith in Jesus, and the blessed work of His Holy Spirit, we shall have it, and then I believe it will be among our songs of glory that heaven and earth pass away, but the word of God and the law of God shall stand fast forever and ever. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Amen.

1661 PRAYING AND PLEADING – JER. 14:7-9

A Sermon Delivered
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do you it for your name's sake: for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against you. O the hope of Israel, the savior thereof in time of trouble, why should you be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turns aside to tarry for a night? Why should you be as a man astonished, as a mighty man that cannot save? yet you, O LORD, are in the midst of us, and we are called by your name; leave us not. — Jeremiah 14:7-9

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Isaiah 43]

THIS PASSIONATE APPEAL for mercy was forced from the people by extreme misery. There was a famine in the land until men fell in the streets of the city exhausted with hunger. Drought had long prevailed, and dearth of water was terribly felt. Meanwhile invasion kept them in perpetual fear, so that the prophet lamented, "If I go forth into the field, then behold the slain with the sword! and if I enter into the city, then behold them that are sick with famine!" Such judgment had God inflicted on a guilty nation for her sin. No springs were bubbling up from the earth, and no rain dropped down from heaven. This dire privation had produced universal distress. "Judah mourns, and the gates thereof languish, they are black unto the ground, and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up."

As the calamity, like a river of lava, burned its dreadful way, an eyewitness, in his heart's anguish, describes a few common scenes which forcefully tell the tale of utter desolation. Princes and peasants are seized with the same consternation, the prophet paints them both with their heads covered in token of a common grief. Here in the city the children are coming back from the place of pools and fountains with empty pitchers, for they find not a drop of water in the pits. Out yonder in the fields the ground is chapped and cleft by the scorching sun in the absence of dew or rain. The plow is of no use in that parched soil. Husbandmen are sitting down ashamed, confounded, utterly dejected, it is vain for them to lift the hand of labor.

Down in the valleys the dumb cattle express their feeling with throes of anguish—the hind calves and forsakes her young, and up on the mountain heights the wild asses prove their share in the universal distress. Those creatures which are most apt to scent water from afar, and to hasten to it to drink, are unable to discover a cooling brook, though they snuff up the wind like dragons. What a dreadful thing for a country to be placed as it were at the oven's mouth, and to become so completely burned up, that even the wild beasts can discover no pasture, and their eyes fail because there is no grass.

Nothing could help the people. Grim death stared them in the face. None of their idol gods could cause rain, and without it they must all perish. Under such circumstances prayer to God was the last and only resource. Driven to their wits' end, they now began to be wise. The prophet has expressed in admirable words the penitent confessions and the earnest supplications of those who were ready to perish. Our text is a most appropriate model of humble petitioning. I can easily imagine that all the Jews of the land were willing enough to adopt this

form of prayer at such an extremity, and to follow it with a fervent, “Amen.”

But alas for them, the feet which had loved to wander were not willing to return, and the hearts which had cast off their allegiance to the Lord were not reconciled to His law of righteousness. The Lord felt compelled to say of them, “I will destroy my people, since they return not from their ways.” Theirs was prayer in terror, not prayer in penitence. How many there are who pray after a fashion in times of dire distress! When the plague was raging, the cross was marked on many a door which else had never known that token. When the cholera rages they go to church. When poverty invades their homes, and they are sorely pinched, they cry, “Lord, have mercy upon us.” When they are brought to death’s door, they entreat, “Send for some minister to come and pray at our side.”

What a wretched business is this—that we should only be disposed to think of God when we are in our utmost need! Dare we treat the Lord as if He were only to be called upon in our emergencies? How can we expect that God will accept prayers that are only forced out of us by selfish fears? It is not uncharitable to suspect that too often such prayers are either hypocritical or superstitious, and far different from the contrite cries which are music in the ears of the Most High.

What a mercy it is that God does hear real prayer, even if it is presented to Him only because we are in distress. “Call upon me,” says the Lord, “in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” When the prodigal went home to his father, his father did not say, “You have only come home because you have a hungry belly. You seek a meal among my hired servants because you could not fill yourself with the husks wherewith the swine are fed.” No, not so. Every word was welcome, every look was love. He “gives liberally, and upbraids not.” He does not fling into the teeth of a sincere penitent any

reproach concerning the past. There is no scowl on the heavenly Father's face, no scolding words are uttered by His lips. Nay, but He opens wide His arms of love, and clasps His lost one to His heart. The Lord of mercy bids the poor and needy come to Him and welcome, though he may have been a rake and a profligate.

What a dreadful state then, must those men be in to whose prayers the God of all grace has resolved to shut His ears. Thank God, my dear hearers, that you are still on praying ground and pleading terms with Him. How terrible is the case of any who have passed the frontier of hope. The case described in this chapter did not admit of pity or pardon. No chastisement could condone crimes which had been so repeated and gloried in. The Lord Himself bade Jeremiah not to pray for these people.

If you read the sequel you will find that God declared that though Moses and Samuel stood before Him, though the mightiest of intercessors and the best and most honored of saints were to join in supplication, yet He would not hear them, for His mind was made up to ease Him of His adversaries. Their hour of doom was come, the scaffold was ready, and the executioner was at hand. Take heed, you that trifle with mercy, lest God should put by the silver scepter and draw the sword out of its sheath. Take heed, you that scorn the mercy seat, lest it turn into a burning throne of wrath, and you “perish from the way while his wrath is kindled but a little.”

That is not the condition of things with us at this time, blessed be His name, and so I may invite you to notice the text as a model prayer, an *excellent example to God's own people who are in a wandering state*, and afterwards I shall use it as an *instructive example for sinners conscious of their sin, who would fain come to God and find mercy*.

I. First, then, I speak to the church of God at large wherever it has backslidden, and to each believer in particular **WHO MAY HAVE DEPARTED FROM THE LIVING GOD IN ANY MEASURE OR DEGREE.**

Would you take with you words and turn unto the Lord? You cannot have better words than those now before you. I will read them again. “O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do you it for your name’s sake: for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against you. O the hope of Israel, the savior thereof in time of trouble, why should you be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turns aside to tarry for a night? Why should you be as a man astonished, as a mighty man that cannot save? yet you, O LORD, are in the midst of us, and we are called by your name; leave us not.”

Begin by pleading guilty. It is hard to bring men to this, yet there is no forgiveness apart from it. “O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do you it for your name’s sake: for our backslidings are many. We have sinned against you.” The sin-stricken soul has no defense, nor even an excuse, to offer on its own behalf. The penitent cries—Guilty, ay, guilty, for there is no denying it. Our iniquities testify against us. If there were no witnesses of our sin, our sins themselves bear witness against us. Oh that every child of God felt this if he has in the least gone aside from the paths of holiness!

It is not only that you see us, O our God, or that our brother Christians may have seen our faults, or even that some scoffers in the world have spied them out, and may be all too ready to bear witness against us, but our sins themselves have gone before us to the judgment seat and testify against us. When the facts are in clear evidence what plea can avail? No witnesses can more effectually secure condemnation. Look at the lives of many professors.

Yea, let us look at our own lives. Is there not enough of fault, enough of folly, enough of failure, for our own lives themselves, without any accusation from without, to witness against us? If I had to stand before God tonight to plead upon the matter of my own righteousness, I could do nothing but lie in the dust and hide my face for very shame, and it must be more or less the same with every believer who knows his own heart and life, and sees it in the light of God's countenance. There is no denying the charge, we are prone to wander. Therefore, O my brother, come with me, take the sinner's place, be abashed as an erring child, and come before the great Father and say, "Our iniquities testify against us."

While there is no denying it, let us *admit that there is no excusing it*, "for our backslidings are many." If we could have excused ourselves for our first faults by offering a degree of extenuation for the fickleness of our youth, yet what are we to say of the transgressions of our riper years? If you, my brethren, could say, "Lord, when we began to be believers we were ignorant and feeble, and we were readily carried away by temptation," you cannot make that apology now when years have given you stability, experience has brought you knowledge, and the favor and protection of God have ripened your character, or should have done so. "Our backslidings are many."

I feel as if I could not preach about this, for it touches my heart, and makes me feel ready to weep. Much rather would I like everyone to say to himself, "What have I done? What have I left undone? How far have I declined from the ways of the Lord?" Turn over the records of your life, brother Christian. What have you done for Christ? What have you done for the truth, for the souls of men, for the spread of your Redeemer's kingdom? Alas, may you not so have lived as even to have disparaged the truth, and done injury to the cause which is so dear to you? "Our backslidings are many."

We cannot count them, their number is as great as their guilt. It is well for us to feel that extenuation and apology and excuse are out of the question. There is no use in our making any pretense to selfjustification. We are compelled to plead—Guilty. Guilty with gross aggravations. Guilty again and again. “Our backslidings are many.” Guilty, though we were under bonds to have lived in a very different fashion.

Ay, and not only is it past denying and past excusing, but also *it is past computing*. We cannot measure how great have been our transgressions, as that next sentence may well imply, “We have sinned *against you*.” It looks, at first sight, as if that were the smaller sentence of the three, but let me read it again, and throw the emphasis where it ought to be, and then you will see that it is the heaviest clause in the indictment. “We have sinned against you.” That is what David always lays the emphasis upon when he makes his confession, “Against you, you only, have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight.” This is the prodigal’s confession, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.”

Oh, brothers and sisters, to have sinned against our Father and His infinite love, against our Savior and His precious blood, against the Holy Ghost and all His gentle striving and His sweet comfortings and blessed teachings—this is to have sinned with a vengeance. What shall we say of ourselves? Do not such sins strike us dumb? Sins against the law and against the Gospel, sins against light and sins against knowledge, sins in our holy things, sins on our knees, sins in our hearts, sins—where are they not? Sins high as the clouds, broad as the earth, immense as the sea. Who shall fathom the great ocean of our iniquity? It is wise for us, therefore, to stand at the bar of God and humbly confess that “Our iniquities testify against us, our backslidings are many, for we have sinned against you.”

Next to this plea of guilty, we find that the culprits do *most vehemently appeal to God for mercy*. Please observe carefully how they order their cause before Him, and with what arguments, as Job has it, they fill their mouths.

No reasons whatever could they fetch from themselves. They dare not plead before God that if He will have mercy upon them they will do better, for their many backslidings render such a promise hopeless. Brothers, are you not sick of promising that you will from this time forward amend your lives? I hardly think that we are convinced of our sinfulness if we flatter ourselves that we shall do better in the future. Can you again trust that broken bone which has let you fall so many times? Can you again trust that tongue of yours when already you have been unable to rule it? Can you trust that flaming member which has been ready to set on fire the course of nature? What, trust your heart again? Go, confide in the wind or the treacherous sea, but trust not your treacherous resolution.

“If I could only have my life over again,” says one, “I should do better.” My brother, I should not like to have my life over again for fear I should do worse, and worse I should do, unless I had more grace. Ah, brothers, it never does to say to God, “Lord, forgive the backslidings of the past, for I shall do better by and by.” Suppose you do. There is no merit in that, but it is a wild supposition, for you will do nothing of the kind. “Ay, but” you say, “I am now more resolved than I was. I am older and wiser now, and I feel quite safe because my resolution is so strong.”

This is fine talk for one who is no better than a reed shaken by the wind. How preposterous is such boasting! Your strong resolution! How strong is the wax before the fire? How strong is the tow in the midst of the flame? Your resolution, however, seems to yourself to be firm as adamant, alas, it is only seeming.

Peter's resolution was strong when he said, "Though I should die with you, yet will I not deny you," yet the look and laugh of a silly maid at the palace door opened his mouth with floods of blasphemy—that mouth which Peter thought would overflow with brave confessions of his Master.

We know not what spirit we are of. We are worse than we think we are. When young folks tell me how terribly wicked they are, and therefore they are afraid that they cannot be saved, I sometimes reply, "Yes, but you are much worse than you think you are." They look so astonished, for they hoped to be comforted, and lo, they are plunged into a deeper ditch. Probably they cry out that they feel themselves to be more weak and foolish than any other people alive. I tell them that most likely they are near the truth, but that they are much worse than they fancy they are, for in fact, they are utterly undone, and there is no good thing in them.

They look bewildered, and then I tell them that the Lord Jesus came to save the weak and worthless, and that He looks after the lost and ruined ones. We lay the axe to the tree of self that men may fly to the tree of life. There must be no reliance upon arguments based upon our own excellence, we must beg for grace and plead for mercy, for upon no other terms but those of grace can the Lord treat us with.

Child of God, it is well for you in prayer before the Lord to get rid of every sort of excuse, apology, or palliation. Let your self-impeachment stand in the forefront of your petition—"O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do you it for your name's sake: for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against you."

But still there is a plea, for *they make a plea out of God's name*. From the badness of the rebellious subjects to the goodness of the righteous Sovereign is a rapid but reasonable transition. A weighty motive is suggested that may dispose God to be

merciful, but that motive is drawn exclusively from Himself—“Though our iniquities testify against us, do it for your name’s sake.” Oh the majesty of the name of the Lord! The fame thereof is wonderful throughout all generations. You have a name, O God, for pardoning iniquity. So David said, “For your name’s sake, O LORD, pardon my iniquity, for it is great.”

Come, then, desponding brothers. Here is a prayer which will avail for us when the night is darkest and not a star is to be seen. “Do you it for your name’s sake”—because it will glorify Your name to save us, because there is something about Your name which encourages our soul to hope. “Do you it for your name’s sake.” The distracted nation is drawn into closer fellowship as the story of the past suggests a plea for her present distress.

Nor is this all, the covenant of grace promises a glorious future, and this *promise is pleaded* as the Lord is called, “*the hope of Israel*.” It is well to draw upon the bank of hope as well as upon the bank of experience. When your cup is full of sorrow, and your face is covered with shame, and not a ray of light falls on your dreary path, remember that there is a history full of grace behind us, and a prophecy full of glory before us, and it is all wrapped up in the name of Him who is the hope of every contrite heart. But take good heed that your hope is not a vague hope. See to it that you believe in God firmly, and that you lay hold upon an actual promise of His Word or some statute of His kingdom very tightly, for then you may hope to your heart’s content.

Though you cannot see the way of deliverance, you can feel that the Lord holds you by the hand. Now plead with Him, “Lord, You are my only hope. You know that I have no hope anywhere else. I am clean driven to despair except You look upon me in Your grace.” This is good pleading. Everyone has a hope somewhere. To the miserable there remains no other

medicine. Deprived of this the sufferer would grow desperate, and his melancholy would drive him to the verge of madness. But there is a hope of some kind in every man's bosom.

Now, if you can truly say, "One thing I know, my hope is alone in You, my God," you may plead that. You may argue thus—"Lord, do save me for your name's sake, that I may never be ashamed of my hope. You have never left a poor soul to use You as its anchor, and then to find that anchor drag and leave the vessel to drift upon a lee-shore. Be true, then, to this Your name, and rescue me, and blot out my transgressions, seeing I put my trust in You." Beloved, a hope so grounded shall never fail you.

The church of God pleads the name of God under another title, "*The Savior thereof in time of trouble.*" God has saved His people. In the roll of fame His name is written as a great Deliverer. The annals of Israel were full of anniversaries. By feasts and fasts they were taught to remember dire emergencies and delightful escapes. The mighty deeds of the Lord whereof their fathers had told them are celebrated in psalms and songs, and their charm is this, that His mercy endures forever.

Here again is a lesson in the art of prayer. He has been a Savior, therefore plead with Him, "Lord, I have no right to salvation, but still, You are a Savior. You have been accustomed to save Your people in time of trouble, save me. Fulfill Your gracious office. Lord, save, or I perish. It will glorify You to save me. Why is Your name thus revealed but to guarantee the grace that is wrapped up in it? Savior is an empty name if You do not save." Is not this fine pleading? O Laodicea, you that are neither cold nor hot, do you mourn your lukewarmness? Then awake to some such a plea as this—"O hope of Israel, O Savior thereof in time of trouble, for your name's sake deal graciously and restoringly with me."

Then, next, she does not mention the name, but it is implied in the words. She says, “Why should you be as a stranger in the land?”—one who is merely traveling through the country and takes little interest in its trouble because he is not a citizen—one who merely puts up for a night in the house, and therefore does not enter into the cares and trials of the family. She does as good as call Him *master*, lord of the house, and *His ownership is pleaded in the suit*.

Jesus, You are head of the family. You are the Lord, the husband. Will You act as if You were a mere lodger or a stranger? Tell Him that your house is His—that the church is His—that He is the head of it, and plead with Him that He will not lay aside His position, or neglect that condescending responsibility which He voluntarily took upon Himself when He became the head of His church, and undertook on her behalf to be her Redeemer. Plead with Him that way, for His name's sake, and you will win a gracious reply.

Then the argument ventures a little farther, and the plea is this, “You, O LORD, are in the midst of us, and we are called by your name.” God's presence with His church and *His connection with it becomes a plea*. Have I not thus pleaded sometimes for this church when I have thought over its sins and its wanderings? I have said—“And yet, Lord, You are in the midst of us. We do have Your presence at Your table and in the prayer meeting. You are with this people right blessedly, and we are called by your name, and if You shall leave us, the ungodly world will say, ‘In that edifice was once assembled a church of God, but it has become deserted. There in former times a Gospel ministry flourished, but it has failed.’ If ever it should be so said, Your name will be dishonored.”

See how Israel pleads in the text—“Why should you be as a man astonished?” That is, like a man confounded, who does not know what to do—who is distracted and amazed. She says,

“Lord, if You do not help us now, the men of the world will say, their God could not help them. They were brought into such a condition at last that their faith was of no use to them, and their God could not deliver them. Why should you be as a mighty man that cannot save? a champion defeated in all his efforts? Nay, but You have given us a banner, a sacred standard that must not suffer defeat, let it be displayed because of the truth, and give us victory.”

Some of you who are trying to serve God have floated into shallow waters lately, and you are in great trouble. Now, if you can somehow implicate God in what you are doing you will greatly strengthen your cause. Are you His servant, acting in His name, and entangled with difficulties that arise out of conscientiously following His command and trusting in His promise? Then you may say to Him, “Lord, what will the Egyptians say? What will the Philistines say? Will they not say that at last it is proved that faith is a delusion, that the promise is a snare, and that there is either no God, or else that He is a God who cannot aid, or will not hear prayer and help His servants?”

I delight to get upon this track. It refreshes me to feel that I have no help but in God, but that His promise binds Him to succor me. When I am quite out of my own depth I feel that I must swim, for if the Lord’s power does not buoy me up, I shall sink to destruction. How can He suffer one to be destroyed whose trust is in Him? If this faith is a lie, it will be exposed by my failure, and if this God is not the living God, and does not hear prayer, the adversaries of the Lord will laugh.

Ah, then you may plead with Him, “Do it for your name’s sake.” Though our iniquities have been many—though we have not served You as we ought to do—though we have backslidden often, yet, Lord, do not punish Yourself on account of us. Do not put Your name to dishonor because of

our folly. Do not put Your Gospel to the rout because we are so unbelieving, but do, for Your own honor's sake, now interpose and deliver Your servants in this their time of need.

II. Having thus tried to put before you, though very feebly, the good ground on which your feet may stand while you are wrestling with God, I want for a very few minutes to speak with **THOSE POOR TROUBLED HEARTS THAT DO NOT YET KNOW THE LORD**, or fear that they do not.

To my text as a whole they have no title, but from the matter of it we may draw some valuable suggestions for their use. Are there not among us many, who though strangers to the fellowship of the saints, are distressed in soul and desirous to find peace with God? Are there not many who would fain obtain salvation from the God of grace? You say, "I want peace." Then, I pray you, take heed that you do not put up with a false peace, or calm your conscience with anything less than true reconciliation with God. Better be always restless than find rest in a delusion. Begin and continue in the way of truth, for this will endure to the end, while all that is false will burst like a bubble.

Begin first by *confessing your guilt*. Come, my dear hearer, there can be no benefit in trying to conceal anything, therefore acknowledge your transgression. God can see it all, but there will be great benefit in your seeing it and confessing it before Him. Do not try to patch up a righteousness of your own. Jesus Christ is never sweet to any but to sinners. You have to prove that you are a sinner, not a saint, for Jesus gave Himself for our sins, not for our merits.

Remember, when Christ comes to fill us, the first thing we need to know is our own emptiness. Do not, therefore, go upon the tack of trying to make any kind of defense, but acknowledge your sins and say, "My iniquities testify against me." Some of you could not make out a plea of righteousness if you were to

try, your life-long actions would confound you if you attempted it. When people come in here who have never heard the Gospel before, they are often brought speedily to receive Christ because, when God blesses the word to such, it is not difficult to convince them of sin. They are so plainly guilty that they do not dream of disguising it. They never attempt to mend their old clothes, for they are too far gone, and only fit for the dunghill. They would only make greater rents by patching up such old and rotten materials.

Come, oh you poor ragged sinners, in all your rended garments, in all your loathsomeness and sin, and say each one, “Lord, I own that my transgressions testify against me. It is not the first time that I have been anxious, or the first time that I have promised better things, but I have been a deceiver until now. My backslidings are many. I am an old sinner, and a hardened sinner. I have sinned against convictions, sinned against a tender conscience, sinned against the restraints of Your Spirit. If I did seem to leave my evil ways the dog has returned to its vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.”

Ah, my hearer, you are a bad fellow, and I want you to own that you are. I want you to stand in the dock like a felon and plead, “Guilty,” but be sure you do not add, “Only there are extenuating circumstances.” There are no such circumstances in your case. You are thoroughly unworthy and deserve to be sent to hell. If you had died in your sins twenty years ago, and had been condemned without mercy, your wickedness would have abundantly vindicated the sentence of the Judge. Do you kick against that? I hope not, it will be your wisdom to admit your terrible desert of punishment. I beseech you, put your confession into words, and state truthfully what you have done. The sense of your wickedness will grow more keen when you recall your follies.

Remember, too, the forms in which you have sinned against God. You have violated the laws which regulate your life. You have set at naught those counsels which make for your physical health and your moral welfare. It is bad enough to have sinned against a mother's tears and a father's prayers. It is bad enough to have sinned against your own body, and to have disregarded your wife and your children. That is sad enough and horrible enough. Many have gone deep enough in that direction to crimson their cheeks with shame.

But you have despised the God that made you, you have dishonored your Creator. You have lived to gratify your own lusts, you have delighted in defying His laws. "The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib," alas, dumb driven cattle have been more dutiful than you. The Lord raised you up from fever, He sheltered you in storm, He rescued you from shipwreck, He has delivered you many times from going down into the pit by sudden death, yet you have been unmindful of Him and unthankful to Him. You have doted on the idols that provoked Him.

Feel this! Own this! Mourn this! Come before the Lord in penitent contrition. But make sure you are sincere. Think not that the language of a litany will avail you if you falsely say, "Lord, have mercy upon us miserable sinners," when you are not miserable, and do not believe that you are sinners at all. Rather may God the Holy Ghost work such deep conviction in your spirit that the language of my text may seem too feeble for you, may you be compelled to cry out, "O God, no speech can tell the depth of my guilt. Forgive me, for Your mercy's sake."

Shall I leave you there sitting down in abject despair? Doubtless in such depths we learn that salvation is of the Lord. Be sure of this—no excuse can exonerate you. Apologies drawn from your constitution or your circumstances will only aggravate your crimes. Your only ground for hope must be

based on His grace. Call now upon His name, “For your name’s sake.” You big sinner say, “Lord, if you will save me, it will be a great instance of *Your power*.”

“Well,” said one the other day, “it is of no use your trying to convert me. If I ever shall be converted it will need God Himself to do it, for I am such a tough fellow.” Yes, yes, and the Lord delights to let men see what He can do, He proves that He is omnipotent in the moral world as well as in the physical world, and as able to subdue free will as to stay the raging of the wild winds that sweep the sea. He is Lord, and besides Him there is none else, when He speaks the word of power, He can turn the lion into a lamb, the raven into a dove.

Oh, plead with Him to glorify His power, say, “Lord, it will show Your power if You will save one like me. If You will cast a legion of devils out of me, I shall be a standing wonder wherever I go. To men and angels I shall be a convincing proof of the regenerating power of the Almighty, therefore save me for your name’s sake.” If the Lord were to forgive a dozen ordinary sinners it would not so much display His *mercy* among men as in saving one unusually vile transgressor. Plead this.

There may be somebody listening to this discourse whom this word exactly suits. I feel as if the Holy Spirit were prompting me to utter these words for your use—“Lord, all the sin in the world seems to have run into me as into a common cesspool, but O Lord, if You can cleanse my heart, it will be a wonder of mercy indeed, and Your name shall be glorified. I am the man who ought to be damned above all men, I deserve to be the center of the target, at which all Your arrows ought to be leveled, but oh, if You will forgive me, it will make all hell quiver with astonishment. That God should save such a one as I will make heaven ring with joy, that such a one should be delivered from going down into the pit because God has found a ransom.”

Here you may remember that all God's name is comprehended in Jesus Christ. This master-key unlocks every door. If you will cry, "Lord, save me for Jesus' sake, that men may see what Jesus can do by the cleansing power of His blood, by the strength of His hand, and by the love of His heart," you will have pleaded the name of the Lord. This argument has matchless force.

The dying thief!—look what glory He has brought to Christ all through the centuries. The apostle Paul, changed, renewed!—what honor he has brought to Christ ever since he was saved! Be this then your prayer, "O Lord, honor Yourself, honor Your Son, honor Your Spirit by saving me. Bless me for your name's sake." Cannot you join me in this prayer? O Holy Spirit, enlighten men as to their lost condition till they feel that there is no other way of pleading, and no other name to plead. Is it not the desire of the Father that Jesus should see of the travail of His soul in the salvation of the chief of sinners?

The Lord give you a grip of that plea. It is sure to prevail, "For your name's sake." You may thus plead the name of the Father, "My Father, glorify Your fatherly heart by welcoming Your prodigal child with a kiss of reconciliation, and saying, 'Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him.'" You may next use it with the Holy Ghost and say—"O divine Spirit, glorify Your power over human hearts, by cleansing and regenerating even me, that men may see Your new creation, and wonder at it as You do work it in me."

A great point is to be able to lay hold upon a promise, a promise in the Book. I recollect when seeking the Lord the sweetness of that saying to my heart—"Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." I found liberty when I could plead that. I said, "Lord, as far as I know what it means, I do call upon Your name. I have no other name to call upon, and You have said that whosoever does call upon Your

name shall be saved. Now, for Your word's sake, do not draw back. I know You cannot lie. Fulfill Your promise even to me.”

Brethren, we cannot say to a man when we have made him a promise, “I promised to do this for you, but you are such a bad fellow.” That would be no excuse for our breaking our promise. You must honor your promise even if you feel ashamed of the person to whom it was made. The Lord in mercy having made a promise never quotes our character as a reason why He should break it. He knew all about you when He made the promise, and so He is not surprised. He knows more about you now than you know about yourself. He knows that you are a thousand times worse than you think you are. He has a much deeper sense of your guilt than you have. Still, for all that, He is ready to pardon. Plead His promise with Him and He will stand to His word.

Do any of you doubt the possibility of your obtaining mercy of the Lord, because of the depths of your iniquity, or the ruinous consequences it has already wrought? Believe me, you are victims of a delusion of Satan. The Lord God merciful and gracious passes by iniquity, transgression, and sin. There are some parts of the book of Jeremiah that I should not like to read to you. I can hardly think that they were meant to be read in public, they are intended rather, for our private meditations.

There is, however, one picture of infamy which I will merely hint at, though it has often excited my profound astonishment. It runs something like this, “They say if a man puts away his wife, and she goes from him and is another man's and plays the harlot, shall he take her to himself again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted? Yet return unto me, says the Lord.” Do you see the drift of this striking illustration? Here is a woman kindly treated in every way, who willfully leaves her husband. She has not been led astray by a profligate, but she

has wantonly left her husband of her own wicked self. She has defiled her name and her honor, and to crown her infamy then she has even left her paramour, and she has gone on the streets and become utterly vile.

Shall her first husband take her back again after her multiplied and manifest impurities? Would it not pollute the land? Everybody will say, “Why, this is an offense against morality. She has dishonored herself, she has dishonored her husband, and she has dishonored her country.” “Yet,” says God, “return unto me.” Is not this beyond the manner of man?

So does the mercy of the Lord transcend even the statutes of the law which He gave to Israel. You will see the force of this more clearly if you compare the third chapter of Jeremiah with the twenty-fourth chapter of Deuteronomy. The parable is startling. God is represented as dealing with an idolatrous nation as it would be an abomination before His own eyes for any man to deal with an unchaste wife. Such delight has JEHOVAH in mercy that He dispenses it at the risk of public odium. He knew that the self-righteous would cavil, and that even elder brothers would be angry, but He dared all that.

Henceforth let there be no demur on your part. “*Yet return again unto me, says the LORD.*” If there be any obloquy it must rest on His name whose holiness cannot be sullied. The elders in our Savior’s day who sat in Moses’ seat thought it an open scandal that He received publicans and harlots. I am not surprised that when He gave welcome to such fallen ones they were glad to come, but I am beyond measure astonished at those of you who put aside the only Gospel that can do you good. Why argue against your own interests instead of accepting the Lord’s open invitation?

Every evangelist who preaches pardon and peace by the blood of the Lamb braves the ethics of the age, the new teaching is that people must reap the consequences of their

actions, there is no hope of ever undoing anything that a man does, and therefore there can be no Gospel to the guilty. Yes, I know that this is what the reign of law seems to demand, but for all that, the Lord would sooner that men should accuse Him of weakening the principles of morality than refuse a poor sinner who comes to Him for mercy in Christ Jesus.

I know that if we receive certain persons into the church, the mere moralists cry out, “How can they associate with such people?” Yet, come along, come along, you chief of sinners. The vilest are welcome to Christ. You that are worse than the worst—you who have leaped over the hedge, and have got upon the wild commons of outrageous sin, may come to Jesus. Do you sing—

“Depths of mercy, can there be
Mercy still reserved for me”?

It is reserved for you. You are the person for whom it is reserved. This deep consciousness of sin, this guilt of yours which you feel and own, points you out as the one to whom I am to say, “Return unto the Lord, for He will have mercy upon you, He will blot out your transgressions, He will change your nature, and He will turn you from a sinner to a saint, and glorify His name in you.” God grant that you may each and all prove the exceeding riches of His grace, for His dear name’s sake. Amen.

1662 INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT – JOHN 7:38-39

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, May 28, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“He that believes on Me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” (But this spoke He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified). — John 7:38-39

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you).” — John 16:7

[Scripture Read before Sermon – John 7:31-39]

IT IS ESSENTIAL, dear friends, that we should worship the living and true God. It will be ill for us if it can be said, “You worship you know not what.” “You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.” The heathens err from this command by multiplying gods, and making this and that image to be the object of their adoration. Their excess runs to gross superstition and idolatry. I fear that sometimes we who “profess and call ourselves Christians,” err in exactly the opposite direction. Instead of worshipping more than God, I fear we worship less than God. This appears when we forget to pay due adoration to the Holy Spirit of God. The true God is

triune, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and though there is but one God, yet that one God has manifested Himself to us in the trinity of His sacred persons. If, then, I worship the Father and the Son, but forget or neglect to adore the Holy Spirit, I worship less than God. While the poor heathen in his ignorance goes far beyond and transgresses, I must take care lest I fall short and fail too. What a grievous thing it will be if we do not pay that loving homage and reverence to the Holy Spirit which is so justly His due. May it not be the fact that we enjoy less of His power and see less of His working in the world because the church of God has not been sufficiently mindful of Him? It is a blessed thing to preach the work of Jesus Christ, but it is an evil thing to omit the work of the Holy Spirit, for the work of the Lord Jesus itself is no blessing to that man who does not know the work of the Holy Spirit. There is the ransom price, but it is only through the Spirit that we know the redemption. There is the precious blood, but it is as though the fountain had never been filled unless the Spirit of God leads us with repenting faith to wash therein. The bandage is soft and the ointment is effectual, but the wound will never be healed till the Holy Spirit shall apply that which the great Physician has provided. Let us not therefore be found neglectful of the work of the divine Spirit, lest we incur guilt, and inflict upon ourselves serious damage.

You that are believers have the most forcible reasons to hold the Holy Spirit in the highest esteem, for what are you now without Him? What were you, and what would you still have been, if it had not been for His gracious work upon you? He quickened you, or else you had not been in the living family of God today. He gave you understanding that you might know the truth, or else would you have been as ignorant as the carnal world is at this hour. It was He that awakened your conscience, convincing you of sin. It was He that gave you abhorrence of

sin, and led you to repent. It was He that taught you to believe, and made you see that glorious Person who is to be believed, even Jesus, the Son of God. The Spirit has worked in you your faith and love and hope, and every grace. There is not a jewel upon the neck of your soul which He did not place there—

“For every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness,
Are His and His alone.”

What have we learned, if we have learned aright, except by the teaching of the Holy Spirit? What can we say either in prayer to God or in teaching to men that shall be acceptable unless we receive the anointing of the Holy One of Israel? Brethren, who is it that has comforted us in our distresses, directed us in our perplexities, strengthened us in our weaknesses, and helped our infirmities in ten thousand ways? Is it not the Comforter whom the Father has sent in Jesus' name? Can I speak too highly of the riches of His grace toward us? Can I too much extol the love of the Spirit? I know I cannot, and you that know what He has worked in you delight to hear Him highly spoken of and His work and offices set forth. We are bound by a thousand ties to seek His honor who has worked in us our salvation. Let us never grieve Him by our ingratitude, but let us endeavor to extol Him. For my part, it shall be the labor of this morning to impress upon you the necessity for His work, and the superlative value of it.

Beloved brethren, notwithstanding all that the Spirit of God has already done in us, it is very possible that we have missed a large part of the blessing which He is willing to give, for He is able to “do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.” We have already come to Jesus, and we have

drunk of the life-giving stream, our thirst is quenched and we are made to live in Him. Is this all? Now that we are living in Him, and rejoicing to do so, have we come to the end of the matter? Assuredly not. We have reached as far as that first exhortation of the Master, “If any man thirsts, let him come unto Me and drink.” But do you think that the generality of the church of God have ever advanced to the next, “He that believes on Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water”? I think I am not going beyond the grievous truth if I say that only here and there will you find men and women who have believed up to that point. Their thirst is quenched, as I have said, and they live, and because Jesus lives they shall live also, but health and vigor they have not. They have life, but they have not life more abundantly. They have little life with which to act upon others. They have no energy welling up and overflowing to go streaming out of them like rivers. They have not thought it possible perhaps, or thinking it possible, they have not imagined it possible to themselves, or believing it possible to themselves they have not aspired to it, but they have stopped short of the fullest blessing. Their wading in to the sacred river has contented them and they know nothing of “waters to swim in.” Like the Israelites of old, they are slow to possess all the land of promise, but sit down when the war has hardly begun. Brothers and sisters let us go in to get of God all that God will give us. Let us set our heart upon this, that we mean to have, by God’s help, all that the infinite goodness of God is ready to bestow. Let us not be satisfied with the sip that saves, but let us go on to the baptism which buries the flesh and raises us in the likeness of the risen Lord, even that baptism into the Holy Spirit and into fire which makes us spiritual and sets us all on flame with zeal for the glory of God and eagerness for usefulness by which that glory may be increased among the sons of men.

Thus I introduce you to my texts, and by their guidance we will enter upon the further consideration of the operations of the Holy Spirit, especially of those to which we would aspire.

I. We will commence with the remark that **THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IS INTIMATELY CONNECTED WITH THE WORK OF CHRIST**. It is a great pity when persons preach the Holy Spirit's work so as to obscure the work of Christ. I have known some do that, for they have held up before the sinner's eyes the inward experience of believers, instead of lifting up first and foremost the crucified Savior to whom we must look and live. The gospel is not "Behold the Spirit of God" but "Behold the Lamb of God." It is an equal pity when Christ is so preached that the Holy Spirit is ignored, as if faith in Jesus prevented the necessity of the new birth, and imputed righteousness, rendered imparted righteousness needless. Have I not often reminded you that in the third chapter of John, where Jesus taught Nicodemus the doctrine, "Except a man is born again of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven," we also read those blessed words, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"? The necessity for regeneration by the Spirit is put very clearly there, and so is the free promise that those who trust in Jesus shall be saved. This is what we ought to do; we must take care to let both these truths stand out most distinctly with equal prominence. They are intertwined with each other and are necessary each to each, what God has joined together let no man put asunder.

They are so joined together that, first of all, *the Holy Spirit was not given until Jesus had been glorified*. Carefully note our first text, it is a very striking one, "This spoke He of the Spirit which

they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet.” The word “given” is not in the original, it is inserted by the translators to help explain the sense, and they were perhaps wise in making such an addition, but the words have more force by themselves. How strong the statement, “For the Holy Spirit was not yet.” Of course, we none of us dream that the Holy Spirit was not yet existing, for He is eternal and self-existent, being most truly God, but He was not yet in fellowship with man to the full extent in which He now is since Jesus Christ is glorified. The near and dear communion of God with man which is expressed by the indwelling of the Spirit could not take place till the redeeming work was done and the Redeemer was exalted. As far as men were concerned, and the fullness of the blessing was concerned, indicated by the outflowing rivers of living water, the Spirit of God was not yet. “Oh,” you say, “but wasn’t the Spirit of God in the church in the wilderness, and with the saints of God in all former ages?” I answer, “Certainly,” but not in the manner in which the Spirit of God now resides in the church of Jesus Christ. You read of the prophets, and of one and another gracious man, that the Spirit of God came upon them, seized them, moved them, spoke by them, but He did not dwell in them. His operations upon men were a coming and a going. They were carried away by the Spirit of God, and came under His power, but the Spirit of God did not rest upon them or abide in them. Occasionally the sacred endowment of the Spirit of God came upon them, but they knew not “the communion of the Holy Spirit.” As a French pastor very sweetly puts it, “He appeared unto men. He did not incarnate Himself in man. His action was intermittent. He went and came, like the dove which Noah sent forth from the ark, and which went to and fro, finding no rest, while in the new dispensation He dwells, He abides in the heart, as the dove, His emblem, which John the Baptist saw descending and

alighting upon the head of Jesus. Affianced of the soul, the Spirit went off to see His betrothed, but was not yet one with her. The marriage was not consummated until Pentecost, after the glorification of Jesus Christ.” You know how our Lord puts it, “He dwells with you and shall be in you.” That indwelling is another thing from being *with* us. The Holy Spirit was with the Apostles in the days when Jesus was with them, but He was not in them in the sense in which He filled them at and after the Day of Pentecost. The operations of the Spirit of God before our Lord’s ascension were not according to the full measure of the gospel, but now the Spirit of God has been poured upon us from on high. Now He has descended and now He abides in the midst of the church, and now we enter into Him and are baptized into the Holy Spirit, while He enters into us and makes our bodies to be His temples. Jesus said, “I will send you another Comforter which shall abide with you forever,” not coming and going, but remaining in the midst of the church. This shows how intimately the gift of the Holy Spirit is connected with our Lord Jesus Christ, inasmuch as in the fullest sense of His indwelling, the Holy Spirit could not be with us until Christ had been glorified. It has been well observed that our Lord sent out seventy evangelists to preach the gospel, even as He had before sent out the twelve, and no doubt they preached with great zeal and produced much stir, but the Holy Spirit never took the trouble to preserve one of their sermons, or even the notes of one. I have not the slightest doubt that they were very crude and incomplete, showing more of human zeal than of divine anointing, and therefore they are forgotten. But no sooner had the Holy Spirit fallen, than Peter’s first sermon is recorded, and from then on we have frequent notes of the utterances of apostles, deacons and evangelists. There was an abiding fullness, and an overflowing of blessing, out of

the souls of the saints after the Lord was glorified, which did not exist among men before that time.

Observe, too, that the Holy Spirit was given after the ascent of our divine Lord into His glory, partly *to make that ascent the more renowned*. When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men. These gifts were men in whom the Holy Spirit dwelt, who preached the gospel unto the nations. The shedding of the Holy Spirit upon the assembled disciples on that memorable day was the glorification of the risen Christ upon the earth. I know not in what way the Father could have made the glory of heaven so effectually to flow from the heights of the New Jerusalem and to come streaming down among the sons of men as by giving that chief of all gifts, the gift of the Holy Spirit when the Lord had risen and gone into His glory. With emphasis may I say, of the Spirit at Pentecost, that He glorified Christ by descending at such a time. What grander celebration could there have been? Heaven rang with Hosannas, and earth echoed the joy. The descending Spirit is the noblest testimony among men to the glory of the ascended Redeemer.

Was not the Spirit of God also sent at that time *as an evidence of our divine Master's acceptance*? Did not the Father thus say to the church, “My Son has finished the work and has fully entered into His glory. Therefore I give you the Holy Spirit”? If you would know what a harvest is to come of the sowing of the bloody sweat and of the death wounds, see the first fruits. Behold how the Holy Spirit is given, Himself to be the first fruits, the earnest of the glory which shall yet be revealed in us. I need no better attestation from God of the finished work of Jesus than this blazing, flaming seal of tongues of fire upon the heads of the disciples. He must have done His work, or such a gift as this would not have come from it.

Moreover, if you desire to see how the work of the Spirit comes to us in connection with the work of Christ, recollect that *it is the Spirit's work to bear witness of Jesus Christ*. He does not take of a thousand different matters and show them to us, but He shall take “of Mine,” says Christ, “and He shall show them unto you.” The Spirit of God is engaged in a service in which the Lord Jesus Christ is the beginning and the end. He comes to men that they may come to Jesus. Hence He comes to convince us of sin that He may reveal the great sacrifice of sin. He comes to convince us of righteousness that we may see the righteousness of Christ, and of judgment that we may be prepared to meet Him when He shall come to judge the quick and dead. Do not think that the Spirit of God has come or ever will come among us to teach us a new gospel, or something other than is written in the Scriptures. Men come to me with their stories and fancies, and tell me that they were revealed to them by the Holy Spirit. I abhor their blasphemous impertinence, and refuse to listen to them for a minute. They tell me this and that absurdity, and then father it upon the Spirit of wisdom. It is enough to try our patience to hear their foolish ravings, but to find the Holy Spirit charged with them is more than we can bear. We have tests and judgments by which to know whether they who claim to speak by the Holy Spirit do so or not, for the testimony of the Spirit is always most honorable to our Lord Jesus Christ, and does not concern itself with the trifles of time and the follies of the flesh.

It is by the gospel of Jesus Christ that the Spirit of God works in the hearts of men. “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.” The Holy Spirit uses the hearing of the word of God for the conviction, conversion, consolation and sanctification of men. His usual and ordinary method of operation is to fasten upon the mind the things of God, and to put life and force into the consideration of them. He revives in men's memories

things that have long been forgotten, and He frequently makes these the means of affecting the heart and conscience. The men can hardly remember hearing these truths, but still they were heard by them at some time or other. Saving truths are such matters as are contained in their substance in the word of God, and lie within the range of the teaching, or the person, or work, or offices of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Spirit's one business here below to reveal Christ to us and in us, and to that work He steadily adheres.

Moreover, *the Holy Spirit's work is to, conform us to the likeness of Jesus Christ.* He is not working us to this or that human ideal, but He is working us into the likeness of Christ that He may be the firstborn among many brethren. Jesus Christ is that standard and model to which the Spirit of God by His sanctifying processes is bringing us till Christ is formed in us the hope of glory.

Evermore it is for the glory of Jesus that the Spirit of God works. He works not for the glory of a church or of a community. He works not for the honor of a man or for the distinction of a sect. His one great objective is to glorify Christ. "He shall glorify Me," is our Savior's declaration, and when He takes of the things of Christ and shows them to us, we are led more and more to reverence and love and adore our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

I will not detain you longer with this. You will see how the works of Jesus and of the Spirit are joined together indissolubly, so that we may neither set the work of Jesus before the work of the Spirit nor the work of the Spirit before the work of Jesus. But we are glad to joy in both and to make much of them. As we delight in the Father's love and the grace of our Lord Jesus, so do we equally rejoice in the communion of the Holy Spirit, and these three agree in one.

II. We will now advance another step, and here we shall need our second text. **THE OPERATIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ARE OF INCOMPARABLE VALUE.** They are of such incomparable value that the very best things we can think of are not thought to be as precious as these are. Our Lord Himself says, “It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you.” Beloved friends, the presence of Jesus Christ was of inestimable value to His disciples, and yet it was not such an advantage to His servants as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Is not this a wonderful statement? Well might our Lord preface it by saying, “Now I tell you the truth,” as if He felt that they would find it a hard saying, for a hard saying it is. Consider for a moment what Christ was to His disciples while He was here, and then see what must be the value of the Spirit’s operations when it is expedient that they should lose all that blessing in order to receive the Spirit of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ was to them their teacher. They had learned everything from His lips. He was their leader, they had never to ask what to do, and they had only to follow in His footsteps. He was their defender, whenever the Pharisees or Sadducees assailed them He was like a brazen wall to them. He was their comforter, in all times of grief they resorted to Him, and His dear sympathetic heart poured out floods of comfort at once. What if I was to say that, the Lord Jesus Christ was everything to them, their all in all. What a father is to his children, yes, what a mother is to her suckling, that was Jesus Christ to His disciples, and yet the Spirit of God’s abiding in the church is better even than all this.

Now take another thought. What would you think if Jesus Christ were to come among us now as in the days of His flesh? I mean not as He will come, but as He appeared at His first advent. What joy it would give you! Oh, the delights, the heavenly joys, to hear that Jesus Christ of Nazareth was on

earth again, a man among men! Should we not clap our hands for joy? Our one question would be, “Master, where do You dwell?” for we should all long to live just where He lived. We could then sympathize with the Negroes when they flocked into Washington in large numbers to take up their residence there. Why, do you think, did they come to live in that city? Because Massa Abraham Lincoln, who had set them free, lived there, and they thought it would be glorious to live as near as possible to their great friend. If Jesus lived anywhere, it would not matter where, if it were in the desert or on the bleakest of mountains, there would be a rush to the place. How the spot would be crowded, what rents they would pay for the worst of tenements if Jesus was but in the neighborhood. But don’t you see the difficulty? We could not all get near Him in any literal or corporeal fashion. Now that the church is multiplied into millions of believers, some of the Lord’s followers would never be able to see Him, and the most could only hope to speak with Him now and then. In the days of His flesh the twelve might see Him every day, and so might the little company of disciples, but the case is altered now that multitudes are trusting in His name.

If our Lord were at this time living in the United States, we should be much grieved to have an ocean between us and our leader, all the companies that could be formed would not be able to run enough boats to carry us over. If the Master personally came here to this little island, it would not hold all the vast company of the faithful who would flock to it. It is much better to have the Holy Spirit, because He is dwelling with us and in us. The difficulties of the bodily presence are too great and so, though we would be thankful, like the apostles, if we had known Christ after the flesh, yet we do not marvel that they expressed little sorrow when they said that after the flesh they knew Him no more. The Comforter had filled the void

caused by His absence, and made them rejoice because the Lord had gone unto His Father.

Are we not apt to think that if our Lord Jesus were here it would give unspeakable strength to the church? Would not the enemy be convinced if they saw Him? No, they would not. If they heard not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be converted though one rose from the dead. Jesus rose, but they did not therefore believe. If our Lord had lingered here all this while, His personal presence would not have converted unbelievers, for nothing can do that but the power of the Holy Spirit.

“But,” you say, “surely it would thrill the church with enthusiasm. Fancy the Lord Himself standing on this platform this morning in the same garb as when He was upon earth. Oh, what rapturous worship! What burning zeal! What enthusiasm! We should go home in such a state of excitement as we never were in before.” Yes, it is even so, but then the Lord is not going to carry on His kingdom by the force of mere mental excitement, not even by such enthusiasm as would follow the sight of His person. The work of the Holy Spirit is a truer work, a deeper work, a surer work, and will more effectually achieve the purposes of God than even would the enthusiasm to which we should be stirred by the bodily presence of our well-beloved Savior. The work is to be spiritual, and therefore the visible presence has departed. It is better that it should be so. We must walk by faith, and by faith alone. How could we do this if we could see the Lord with these mortal eyes? This is the dispensation of the unseen Spirit, in which we render glory to God by trusting in His word, and relying upon the unseen energy. Now, faith works and faith triumphs though the world sees not the foundation upon which faith is built, for the Spirit who works in us cannot be discerned by carnal minds. The world sees Him not, neither knows Him.

Thus you see that the operations of the Holy Spirit must be inestimably precious. There is no calculating their value, since it is expedient that we lose the bodily presence of Christ rather than remain without the indwelling of the Spirit of God.

III. Now go back to my first text again and follow me in the third head. Those operations of the Spirit of God, of which I am afraid some Christians are almost ignorant, are of wondrous power. The text says, “He that believes on Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” **THESE OPERATIONS ARE OF MARVELOUS POWER.** Brethren, do you understand my text? Do rivers of living water flow out of you?

Notice, first, that this is to be *an inward work*. The rivers of living water are to flow out of the midst of the man. The words are according to our version, “Out of his belly”—that is, from his heart and soul. The rivers do not flow out of his mouth. The promised power is not oratory. We have had plenty of words, floods of words, but this is heart work. The source of the rivers is found in the inner life. It is an inward work at its fountainhead. It is not a work of talent and ability, and show, and glitter, and glare; it is altogether an inward work. The life-flood is to come out of the man’s inmost self, out of the heart and essential being of the man. Homage is shown too generally to outward form and external observance, though these soon lose their interest and power. But when the Spirit of God rests within a man, it exercises a home rule within him and he gives great attention to what an old divine was known to call, “the home department.” Alas, many neglect the realm within which is the chief province under our care. O my brothers and sisters in Christ, if you would be useful, begin with yourself. It is out of your very soul that a blessing must come. It cannot come out of you if it is not in you, and it cannot be in you unless God the Holy Spirit places it there.

Next, it is *life-giving* work. Out of the heart of the man, out of the center of his life, are to flow rivers of living water. That is to say, he is instrumentally to communicate to others the divine life. When he speaks, when he prays, when he acts, he shall, so speak and pray and act that there shall be going out of him an emanation which is full of the life of grace and godliness. He shall be a light by which others shall see. His life shall be the means of kindling life in other men's bosoms. "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

Note *the plenitude* of it. The figure would have been a surprising one if it had said, "Out of him shall flow a river of living water," but it is not so, it says rivers. Have you ever stood by the side of a very abundant spring? We have some such not far from London. You see the water bubbling up from many little mouths. Observe the sand dancing as the water forces its way from the bottom, and there, just across the road, a mill is turned by the stream which has just been created by the spring. And when the waterwheel is turned, you see a veritable river flowing forward to supply Father Thames. Yet this is only one river, what would you think if you saw a spring yielding such supplies that a river flowed from it to the north, and a river to the south, a river to the east, and a river to the west? This is the figure before us, rivers of living water flowing out of the living man in all directions. "Ah," you say, "I have not reached to that." A point is gained when you know, confess, and deplore your failure. If you say, "I have all things and abound," I am afraid you will never reach the fullness of the blessing. But if you know something of your failure, the Lord will lead you further. It may be that the spirit of life which comes forth for you is but a trickling brooklet, or even a few tiny drops; then be sure to confess it, and you will be on the way to a fuller blessing. What a word is this! Rivers of living water! Oh that all professing Christians were such fountains.

See how *spontaneous* it is, “Out of his belly shall flow.” No pumping is required, nothing is said about machinery and hydraulics, the man does not need exciting and stirring up, but, just as he is, influence of the best kind quietly flows away from him. Did you ever hear a great hubbub in the morning, a great outcry, a sounding of trumpets and drums, and did you ever ask, “What is it?” Did a voice reply, “The sun is about to rise, and he is making this noise that all may be aware of it”? No, he shines, but he has nothing to say about it. Even so, the genuine Christian just goes about flooding the world with blessings, and so far from claiming attention for himself, it may be that he is unconscious of what he is bringing about. God so blesses him that his leaf does not wither, and whatever he does is prospering, for he is like a tree planted by the rivers of water that bring forth its fruit in its season. His verdure and fruit are the natural outcome of his vigorous life. Oh, the blessed spontaneity of the work of grace when a man gets into the fullness of it, for then he seems to eat and drink and sleep eternal life, and he spreads a savor of salvation all around.

And this is to be *perpetual*—not like intermittent springs which burst forth and flow in torrents, and then cease—but it is to be an everyday gushing out. In summer and winter, by day and by night, wherever the man is, he shall be a blessing. As he breathes, he shall breathe benedictions; as he thinks, his mind shall be devising generous things, and when he acts, his acts shall be as though the hand of God were working by the hand of man.

I hope I hear many sighs rising up in the place! I hope I hear friends saying, “Oh that I could get to that.” I want you to attain the fullness of the favor. I pray that we may all get it; because Jesus Christ is glorified therefore the Holy Spirit is given in this fashion, given more largely to those in the kingdom of heaven than to all those holy men before the Lord’s

ascent to His glory. God gives no stinted blessing to celebrate the triumph of His Son. God gives not the Spirit by measure unto Him. On such an occasion heaven's grandest liberality was displayed. Christ is glorified in heaven above, and God would have Him glorified in the church below by vouchsafing a baptism of the Holy Spirit to each of us.

So I close by this, which I hope will be a very comforting and inspiring reflection.

IV. THESE OPERATIONS OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD ARE EASILY TO BE OBTAINED BY THE LORD'S CHILDREN. Did you say you had not received them? They are to be had; they are to be had at once. First, they are to be had by *believing in Jesus*. "This spoke He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive." Do you not see that it is faith which gives us the first drink and causes us to live? And this second, more abundant blessing, of being ourselves made fountains from which rivers flow comes in the same way. Believe in Christ, for the blessing is to be obtained, not by the works of the law, or by so much fasting, and striving, and effort, but by belief in the Lord Jesus for it. With Him is the residue of the Spirit. He is prepared to give this to you, yes, to every one of you who believe on His name. He will not of course make all of you preachers, for who then would be hearers? If all were preachers the other works of the church would be neglected. But He will give you this favor that out of you there shall stream a divine influence all around you to bless your children, to bless your servants, to bless the workmen in the house where you are employed, and to bless the street you live. In proportion as God gives you opportunity, these rivers of living water will flow in this channel and in that, and they will be pouring forth from you at all times, if you believe in Jesus for the full blessing, and can by faith receive it.

But there is another thing to be done as well, and that is to *pray*, and here I want to remind you of those blessed words of the Master, “Everyone that asks receives; and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?” You see, there is a distinct promise to the children of God, that their heavenly Father will give them the Holy Spirit if they ask for His power, and that promise is made to be exceedingly strong by the instances joined to it. If there is a promise that God can break (which there is not), this is not the promise, for God has put it in the most forcible and binding way. I know not how to show you its wonderful force. Did you ever hear of a man who when his child asked for bread gave him a stone? Go to the worst part of London, and will you find a man of that kind? You shall if you like, get among pirates and murderers, and when a little child cries, “Father, give me a bit of bread and meat,” does the most wicked father fill his own little one’s mouth with stones? Yet the Lord seems to say that this is what He would be doing if He were to deny us the Holy Spirit when we ask Him for His necessary working. He would be like one that gave his children stones instead of bread. Do you think the Lord will ever bring Himself down to that? He says, “*How much more* shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?”

He makes it a stronger case than that of an ordinary parent. The Lord must give us the Spirit when we ask Him, for He has herein bound Himself by no ordinary pledge. He has used a simile which would bring dishonor on His name, and that of the very grossest kind, if He did not give the Holy Spirit to

them that ask Him. Oh, then, let us ask Him at once, with all our hearts. Am I not so happy as to have in this audience some who will immediately ask? I pray that some who have never received the Holy Spirit at all may now be led, while I am speaking, to pray, “Blessed Spirit, visit me, lead me to Jesus.” But especially those of you that are the children of God—to you this promise is especially made. Ask God to make you all that the Spirit of God can make you, not only a satisfied believer who has drunk for himself, but a useful believer who overflows the neighborhood with blessing.

I see here a number of friends from the country who have come to spend their holiday in London. What a blessing it would be if they went back to their respective churches overflowing, for there are numbers of churches that need flooding. They are dry as a barn floor, and little dew ever falls on them. Oh that they might be flooded! What a wonderful thing a flood is! Go down to the river, look over the bridge, and see the barges and other crafts lying in the mud. All of the king's horses and all the king's men cannot tug them out to sea. There they lie, dead and motionless as the mud itself. What shall we do with them? What machinery can move them? Have we a great engineer among us who will devise a scheme for lifting these vessels and bearing them down to the river's mouth? No, it cannot be done. Wait till the tide comes in! What a change! Each vessel walks the water like a thing of life. What a difference between the low tide and the high tide. You cannot stir the boats when the water is gone, but when the tide is at the full, see how readily they move, a little child may push them with his hand. Oh, for a flood of grace. May the Lord send to all our churches a great springtide! Then the indolent will be active enough, and those who were half dead will be full of energy. I know that in this particular dock several vessels are lying that I should like to float, but I cannot stir them. They

neither work for God nor come out to the prayer meetings, nor give of their substance to spread the gospel. If the flood would come, you would see what they are capable of, they would be active, fervent, generous, abounding in every good word and work. So may it be! So may it be! May springs begin to flow in all our churches, and may all of you who hear me this day get your share of the streams. Oh that the Lord may now fill you and then send you home bearing a flood of grace with you. It sounds odd to speak of a man's carrying home a flood within him, and yet I hope it will be so, and that out of you shall flow rivers of living water. So may God grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

1663 THE TRUE GOSPEL – 2 COR. 4:3-4

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, June 4, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.”

— 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

[Scripture Read before Sermon – 2 Corinthians 3:12-18; 4:1-10]

I THINK IN THIS CASE the Revised New Testament gives a better translation than does the Authorized Version, and I will therefore read it—“*But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled in them that are perishing: in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them.*” Paul had been speaking of Moses with the veil over his face, and we lose the track of his thought if we use the word “hid” instead of “veiled.” Our gospel wears no veil, but exhibits all the glory of its countenance to the sons of men. Oh that they may be able steadfastly to behold it, and see in it their own salvation and the glory of the Lord.

Observe at the outset the confidence with which Paul speaks. It is abundantly evident that he has no doubt whatever that the gospel which he proclaims is assuredly true, no, that it

is so manifestly true that if those who have heard it do not accept it, it must be because the god of this world has blinded their minds. The accent of conviction makes every word emphatic. He believes and is sure, and he is convinced that those who do not believe must be under the thralldom of the devil.

This is not the ordinary style in which the gospel is preached nowadays. We hear men courteously apologize for stating anything as certain, for they are fearful of being thought narrow-minded and bigoted. We hear them prove what is clear as noonday, and back up with arguments what God Himself has said, as if the sun needed candles to exhibit it, or as if God's word needed the support of human reasoning. The apostle did not take the defensive ground at all. He carried the war across the border and assailed the unbelievers. He came forth fresh from God with a revelation, and his every word seemed to challenge men with—"This is God's word, believe it, for if you do not you will incur sin, and prove that you are lost, and are under the influence of the devil." When the gospel was preached in that royal style it prevailed mightily and annihilated opposition. Quibblers came, of course. "What will this babbler say?" was a common question, but the heralds of the cross made short work of all quibblers, for they simply went on declaring the glorious gospel. Their one word was, "This is from God. If you believe it you shall be saved, if you reject it you shall be damned." They made no bones about it, but spoke like men who believed in their message, and judged that it left unbelievers without excuse. They never altered their doctrine or softened the penalty of refusing it. Like fire among stubble, the gospel consumed all before it when it was preached as God's revelation.

It does not spread today with equal rapidity because many of its teachers have adopted what they fancy are wiser methods.

They have become less certain and more indifferent, and therefore they reason and argue where they should proclaim and assert. Some preachers rake up all the nonsense that any scientific or unscientific man likes to bring forward, and spend half their time in trying to answer it. What can be the use of untying the knots which are tied by skeptics? They only tie more. It is not for my servant to dispute my message, but to deliver it correctly as mine, and there leave it. If we get back again to the old platform, and speak as from God, we shall not speak in vain, for He will surely honor His own word. The preacher should either speak in God's name or hold his tongue. My brother, if the Lord has not sent you with a message, go to bed, or to school, or mind your farm, for what does it matter what you have to say on your own? If heaven has given you a message, speak it out as he ought to speak who is called to be the mouth for God. If we are to make up our gospel as we go along, out of our own heads, and compound our own theology, as chemists make up mixtures of drugs, we have an endless task before us, and failure stares us in the face. Alas for the weakness of human wit and the fallacy of mortal reasoning! But if we have to deliver what God declares, we have a simple task, and one which must lead to grand results, for the Lord has said, "My word shall not return unto Me void."

Where did the apostle learn to speak thus positively? He tells us in the first verse of the chapter, "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not." He had himself been once a persecutor and he had been convinced of his error by the appearance of the Lord Jesus to him. This was a great deed of mercy. He now knew that his sins were forgiven him, he felt in his own heart that he was a regenerated man, changed, cleansed, newly created, and this was to him overwhelming evidence that the gospel was from God. To himself at any rate, the gospel was a truth past

argument, needing no other demonstration than its marvelous effect upon himself. Having received mercy for himself, he judged that other men were in need of mercy even as he was, and that the same gospel which had brought light and comfort to his own soul would bring salvation to them also. This braced him to his work. By this consciousness he was made to speak as one having authority. There was no hesitancy about him, for he spoke what he felt. Ah, friends, we not only deliver a message which we believe to be from God, but we tell out that which we have tested and tried within our own souls. An unconverted preacher must be in a sorry plight, for he lacks evidence of the truth which he proclaims. A man who is not familiar with the effect of the gospel upon his own heart must endure much disquietude when he stands up to preach upon it. What does he really know about it if he has never felt its power? But if he has been converted by its means then he is confident, and is not to be moved by the questions and quibbles of those who oppose him. His inner consciousness strengthens him in the delivery of his message. We must also feel the influence of the word that we may speak what we do know, and testify what we have seen. Having received mercy we cannot but speak of that mercy positively as of a thing which we have tested and handled, and knowing that it is God who has given us the mercy we cannot but speak with anxious desire that others may partake of divine grace.

We now come to consider our text. Our first observation shall be, *the gospel is in itself a glorious light*, for in the fourth verse Paul speaks of the light of the glorious gospel of Christ. Secondly, *this gospel is in itself plain and simple*. Thirdly, *if we preach it as we ought to preach it we keep it plain*, and do not muddle it up by worldly wisdom. And fourthly, it being in itself a great light, and in itself clear, and the preaching being clear, therefore, *if men do not see, it is because they are lost*, it is a fatal sign when men

are unable to perceive the light of the gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ.

I. First, then, **THE GOSPEL IS IN ITSELF A GLORIOUS LIGHT.** In countless places it is so described in the New Testament. This is the light which has come into the world. “The darkness is past, and the true light now shines.” Observe that this light *reveals the glory of Christ*. This is the new translation, and it is a valuable one—“The light of the gospel of the Glory of Christ.” You know the Hebrews had a different mode of expression from the Greek, and if we are to read the Greek as though Paul Hebraized it, then we read it according to the version we have here—“the glorious gospel of Christ.” But if we read the Greek as Greek, then it runs, “the light of the gospel of the Glory of Christ.” The renderings are equally true, but the second one has a fullness and freshness of sense about it worthy of special note. The gospel reveals the glory of Christ. It tells us that He is the eternal Son of the Father, by whom all things were made, for whom all things were created, and by whom they continue to exist. This might not have been good news to us if it had stood alone, though it ought always to be good to the creature to be informed of his Creator. But the gospel further reveals to us that this ever-blessed Son of the Highest came down to earth in infinite pity, espoused our nature, and was born at Bethlehem, and became as truly man as He was assuredly God. This was the first note of the gospel, and there was so much delight in it that it set all the angels in heaven singing, and the shepherds who kept watch over their flocks by night heard the chorales of the first Christmas rung out from the midnight sky—“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” It could not but mean peace to man that God should become man. It could not but mean mercy to the guilty that the heir of glory should be born into their race. It must be good news to us that the offended

One should take upon Himself the nature of the offender. So the first pure gospel music rang out, that made glad the ear of mankind. The Lord God omnipotent became Immanuel—God with us, “Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and His name shall be called Wonderful.”

This is the beginning of the gospel of the glory of Christ. He gained a greater glory by laying aside His divine glory. Furthermore, the gospel tells us that this same mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, dwelt here among men, preaching and teaching, and working miracles of matchless mercy, everywhere proving Himself to be man’s brother, sympathetic and tender and gentle, receiving to Himself even the lowest of the people, and bowing Himself to the least of the race. It is written, “Then drew near unto Him the publicans and sinners for to hear Him,” and again He took little children into His arms, and blessed them, and said, “Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not.” There was a gospel about all that He did, and glory which men who are pure in heart both see and admire. His life was good news, it was a new and a glad thing that God should dwell among men, and be found in fashion as a man. The God, that hates sin and whose wrath burns against iniquity, tabernacled among sinners, and saw and felt their evil ways, and prayed for them, “Father, forgive them.” His glory lay in His being so patient, gentle, and self-sacrificing, and yet so just and true. Well did John say, “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.”

But the gospel’s biggest bell, which rings out with clearest note, is that this Son of God in due time gave Himself for our sins, making an offering of His whole human nature as a propitiation for the guilt of men. Herein is an excessive glory of love. What a sight it was to see Him in the garden oppressed

with our load of guilt till the bloody sweat was forced from Him. To see Him bearing that stupendous weight up to the tree, and there hanging in agonies of death, bearing the desertion of His Father, and all the thick clouds of darkness that came of it, dying the “just for the unjust to bring us to God”! It was the glory of Christ that He was there bereft of all glory. Never can a more glorious thing be said of Him than that He for our sakes was obedient to death, even the death of the cross. And this is the gospel we preach, the gospel of substitution, that Jesus stood in the sinner’s place and bore in the sinner’s stead what was due to the law of God on account of man’s transgression. Tell it out among the heathen that the Lord reigns from the tree—

“Fling out the banner!

Let it float Skyward and seaward, high and wide;

Our glory only in the cross,

Our only hope, the Crucified.”

No gladder news could come to man than that the incarnate God had borne man’s sins and died in man’s place. Yet there is another note, for He that died and was buried is risen from the dead, and has borne our nature up into glory, and there He wears it at the Father’s right hand. His loving heart is still occupied with the same divine errand that brought Him down below; He is by His intercession saving sinners whom He purchased with His blood. He is able to, save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him, seeing He always lives to make intercession for them. This is the gospel of the glory of Christ. It is our Lord’s glory that He mediates between man and God, pleading for the unjust ones, using as His all-prevailing argument the blood which He has shed.

But I must not leave out the fact that He who now in glory pleads for sinners will speedily come again to gather all His own unto Himself, to shed abroad on them the fullness of His own glory, and to take them up to be with Him where He is. There is wondrous light in the gospel, both for the future and the present. It sets forth to us the glory of Christ, the glory of love, the glory of mercy, the glory of a blood which can wash the blackest white, the glory of a plea which can make the poorest prayer acceptable, the glory of a living and triumphant Savior, who having put His hands to the work will not fail nor be discouraged till all the purposes of infinite love shall be achieved by Him. This is “the gospel of the glory of Christ,” and the light of it is exceedingly clear and bright.

We are now called to a second truth, the gospel is a light which *reveals* God Himself, for according to our text the Lord Jesus is the image of God. Did not Jesus say, “He that has seen Me has seen the Father”? For, first, our Lord Jesus is the image of God in this sense, that He is essentially one with God. He is “the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of His person.” He is “very God of very God,” as the creed has it, and I know not how better to express the idea. Our Lord Himself said, “I and My Father are one.” But the text means more than that. Christ is the image of God in this sense, that He shows us what God is. If you know the character of Jesus, you know the character of God. God Himself is invisible, and is not seen of mortal eye, neither can He be comprehended of finite mind. He cannot, indeed, be truly known at all except by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. But all that can be known of God is fairly written in capital letters in the person of Jesus. What higher conception of God can you have? Even those who have denied our Lord’s deity have yet been subdued into admiration by His matchless character. Read His life through, and see if you could improve it. Can you suggest anything that

should be left out, or anything that could be added? He is God, and in Him we see God as far as it is possible for us to discern that matchless Father of our spirits. Thus the gospel is full of light, revealing first the Mediator and then the Lord God Himself.

Now dear friends, this gospel of the glory of Christ *is really light to us*, that is to say, it brings with it all that the metaphor of light sets forth. First of all it brings illumination. It is lighting up of the soul “to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” It is light to the understanding to be able to see that the Only Begotten has revealed the Father. Man feels after God if by chance he may find Him and the heathen stumbles upon this and that in his blind groping. Perhaps the world was nearest the truth when it called Him, “the unknown God.” When the wisdom of this world once began to define and to describe the Deity, then it proved its own folly. “The world by wisdom knew not God,” but in the person of the Lord Jesus we have the true *icon*, the image and representation of the Godhead. It cannot be said of true Christians, “You worship you know not what,” for we know what we worship. Each one of us can affirm, “I know whom I have believed.” We have no question about who is our God, or what He is. There is a knowledge given by the gospel to men, which creates daylight in the understanding.

But it is light in another sense, namely, that of comfort. Let a man see God in Jesus Christ, and he cannot be unhappy. Is it sin that burdened him? Let him see Jesus Christ bearing sin in His own body on the tree, and let him believe in this same sin-bearer, and that burden is gone. Let him be fretting under the cares and trials of life, and let him get a view by faith of Jesus, an infinitely greater sufferer, sympathizing with him in his sorrow, and surely the sting of his grief is removed. Is he afraid to die? Let him hear Jesus say, “I am the resurrection and the

life,” and he shall be taught rather to long for death than to dread it. Is he troubled about the things to come? Does the awful future threaten darkly before him? Let him only hear Jesus say, “I am He that lives and was dead, and am alive forevermore, amen, and hold the keys of hell and death,” and he will no longer be afraid of the separate world of spirits of which Christ has the key, nor will he tremble at the burning of the world, and the ruin of creation, for he has a hold upon One who has said, “Because I live you shall live also.” Never did such another light ever shine upon the sons of men. Neither for instruction nor for comfort can this eternal truth be rivaled. It was not in the power of an archangel to tell you the joy which this “gospel of the glory of Christ” has given to the sons and daughters of affliction. Wherever it comes it liberates the captive mind, and removes the pains of remorse. At the very sight of it tearful eyes are brightened till they flash with delight. Oh, the joy unspeakable of having Christ to be our Savior, and the glorious God to be our Father. He is rich to all the intents of bliss who knows this. This is light and all else is darkness. We now advance a step, and observe that—

II. THIS GOSPEL IS IN ITSELF MOST PLAIN AND CLEAR.

The gospel contains nothing which can perplex anybody unless he wishes to be perplexed. There is nothing in the gospel which a man may not apprehend if he desires to apprehend it. It is all plain to the man who yields his understanding to his God. Whenever I get a book which puzzles me very much to make out its meaning, I wish I could send it back to the author, and tell him to write it over again, because I am sure he is not very clear about his own meaning, or else he could easily make me know what he meant. A man has never fairly mastered a subject until he is able to communicate his thoughts on that subject, so that persons of ordinary intelligence can tell what he means. Now, the Lord has in His own mind a clearly-defined way of

salvation for men, and He has expressed Himself without ambiguity. Certain divines like to preach an incomprehensible gospel, for it gives them the air of wisdom in the judgment of the foolish. Certain hearers prefer sermons which they cannot understand. To them the difficult and intricate are as marrow and fatness. I heard of one who said he liked a bit of gristle in the sermons, or a bone to try his teeth upon. We could easily gratify such friends, but we see no authority in Scripture for gratifying this longing. I carefully endeavor to take the stones out of the fruit before preparing the dish. When we are eating, it is by no means a good thing to swallow the bones, for our digestion might not master them, and we might be injured by their presence within. Souls want spiritual nutriment, not problems and riddles. So, when a man preaches the gospel so that you cannot make heads or tails of it, you need not fret, for what he has to say is not worth your trouble in listening to it. If it is the Lord's own gospel, you who are doers of the Lord's will can understand it, and if you cannot it is not the gospel of the glory of Christ, but a gospel of human inventing. The true gospel is simplicity itself.

Listen! That God should come among men and espouse our nature is so far a great mystery that we do not know *how* it could be. Blessed be God, we do not need to know *how* it was done, we only know that it was done, and that fact is enough for us. We understand that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we rejoice therein. Observe the doctrine of the atonement—this also as a fact is plain enough. How it became right for Christ to suffer in our place, and for His sufferings to be expiation for our sins, may be a very deep question, but the fact is clearly revealed. I do not think substitution to be a bewildering mystery, but some do. What if it is? The secret reason of it is nothing to us. If God has set forth Christ to be a propitiation for our sins, our most reasonable course is to

accept Him. We need not quarrel with grace because we cannot understand everything about it. It is wiser to eat that which is set before us than to die of hunger because we do not know all the secrets of cooking. I am not asked to understand *how* God justifies us in Christ, but I am asked to believe that He does so. The fact is plain enough, and the fact is the object of faith.

That Jesus should suffer in my place is a simple matter of the truth, and in it there is no darkness at all. That precious doctrine that we are justified by faith, that all the merit of Christ's glorious work comes to us simply by our believing, is there any difficulty about that? I know that men may argue till they are blue in the face, but the doctrine is plain as a walking stick. At times persons inquire, "What is believing?" Well, it is trusting, depending, leaning upon, relying upon—that is all. Is there anything hard about that? Do you want to put on your spectacles to see through it? Will it require a week to work your way into the idea? No, the fact that God was made flesh and dwelt among us, and that being found in fashion as a man, He became obedient to death for our sakes, and that He now bids us simply trust Him and we shall live, is as simple as any truth within the sphere of knowledge. Some people would like a gospel of puzzlement, they prefer a little confusion of the intellect, and they love to wander in a luminous haze, in which nothing is clearly defined. They feel that they are getting on when they are leaving others behind, and rising into sublime absurdity. Now, suppose the gospel consisted in terrible mysteries, bristling with matters hard to be understood, suppose it required 18 volumes to be read through before you could see it? Suppose it needed mathematical precision and classical elegance before you could see it—millions would never get to heaven, for they have never read through a single volume, and therefore, they are not likely to digest a library.

Some men are so busy, and some have their brains so constituted, that they never will be deep students, and if the gospel required of them deep thought and long research, they might give themselves up for lost. If men needed to be philosophers in order to be Christians, the majority of men would be out of the pale of hope. If the masses of the people must read hard before they can catch the idea of salvation by faith in Christ Jesus, they will never catch the idea, they must inevitably perish. And would you, learned men, like them to perish? I fear that some of you have less concern about that than about your own credit for talent and thought. For the sake of getting a profound little gospel all to yourselves, you would dig a moat around the cross to keep the vulgar crowd from intruding. That is not the gospel, nor the spirit of the Lord Jesus. Take care lest you miss the truth yourselves. I fear that while you are fumbling for the latch of heaven's gate, the people whom you despise will get inside the door and be singing, "Glory, hallelujah, we have found the Savior." The Lord permits the disputer of this world to stumble, while those who receive the kingdom of God as little children find out the great secret, and rejoice in it.

Suppose the gospel had been such a difficult thing to explain, and such a very hard matter to understand, what would become of the many who are now rejoicing in Christ, and yet have by birth and constitution the shallowest capacities? It is wonderful how one but little raised above an idiot, can yet grasp the gospel. What a blessing that it is so! I have heard of a poor boy whom his teachers had been instructing for years, and one day they said to him, "Well, Jack, have you a soul?" "No, I've got no soul." They feared that they had lost their labor, but their minds were changed when he added, "I had a soul once, and I lost it, and Jesus Christ came and found it, and so I let Him keep it." That was better gospel than we get from many a

learned divine. He had the whole thing at his fingertips. Christ had found his soul, and was keeping it for him, even He who will not fail to keep that which we have committed to His charge. We clap our hands for joy because the gospel reveals the plain man's pathway to heaven, and makes the most illiterate wise unto salvation. The shepherd on Salisbury Plain can understand the gospel as well as the Bishop in Salisbury Cathedral, and the dairyman's daughter can feel its power as fully as a Princess. Suppose the gospel was hard to be understood, what should we do at the deathbed? We are sent for all in a hurry to see persons who have neglected attendance upon the means of grace, and are dying in ignorance. It is our sorrowful task to explain the path of life to them when they are entering upon the dark descent of death. While the lamp continues to burn we have hope, and therefore we proceed to state the way by which a sinner may return to God. Is it not well to have it packed away in a small compass and expressed in common words? We tell them that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. What could we do if the gospel were not thus plain? Must I have a handcart and wheel it about with me, so as to carry to each dying man half-a-dozen folios in Latin? Nothing of the kind. Right well do Cowper's often-quoted lines set forth the plainness of the gospel, and rebuke those who reject it on that account—

“Oh how unlike the complex work of man,
Heaven's easy, artless, unencumbered plan!
No meretricious graces to beguile,
No clustering ornaments to clog the pile—
From ostentation as from weakness free,
It stands like the sky-blue arch we see,
Majestic in its own simplicity.

Inscribed above the portal from afar
Conspicuous as the brightness of a star,
Legible only by the light they give,
Stand the soul-quickenings words—
Believe and Live.
Too many, shocked at what should charm them most,
Despise the plain direction and are lost.
Heaven on such terms!
(They cry with proud disdain)—
Incredible! Impossible and vain!—
Rebel because 'tis easy to obey,
And scorn, for its own sake, the gracious way.”

III. Thirdly, IN THE TRUE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL THIS SIMPLICITY IS PRESERVED. Paul expressly said—
“Having this hope in us, we use great plainness of speech.” And yet again, “My speech and my preaching were not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” The apostle Paul was a deep thinker, a man of profound insight and subtle mind. The bent of his mind was such that he would have made a metaphysician of supreme rank, or a mystic of the deepest darkness, but he went against his natural inclination, and devoted all his energies to the unveiling of the gospel. It was a sublime self-denial for him to put on one side all his logic among the other things which he counted loss for Christ, for he says, “I determined not to know anything among men save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” He “determined,” he was resolute, and had made up his mind to it, or he would not have accomplished it. He was the man who wrote some things hard to be understood, which Peter mentions, but when he came to the gospel, he would have nothing but simplicity there. He was tender among them as a nurse with her child, and made himself an instructor of babes,

dealing out the word with such plainness as children would require.

The true man of God will not veil the gospel beneath performances and ceremonies. Mark those who do this, and avoid them. We see his reverence walking with clasped hands to the right and to the left, repeating Latin sentences unknown by the people. He turns, and bobs, and turns again. We see his face for a moment and then his back. I suppose, it is all meant for edification, but I, poor creature, cannot find the least instruction in it, nor, as far as I can discover, do the people who are looking on. What do these little boys in pretty gowns making such a smoke, mean? And what are these flowers and images on the altar? What a splendid cross is that which adorns the priest's back! It seems to be made of roses. The folks look on, and some are wondering where he buys his lace, while others are speculating as to the quantity of wax which will be consumed in those candles every hour, and there is the end of it. Christ is veiled behind the millinery, if He is there at all. I know numbers who would disdain to do that, and yet they hide their Lord under finery of language. It is a grand thing to mount aloft upon the wings of eloquence and display the glory of speech, till you ascend in a splendid peroration, as many another exhibition closes with fireworks.

But this is not becoming to preachers of the Lord Jesus. I always tell our young men that one of their commandments should be, "You shall not perorate." To attempt anything grand in language when we are preaching salvation is to leave our proper work. Our one business is to tell out the gospel plainly. We deal in bread, not in flowers. Let tawdry ornaments be left to the stage or to the bar, where men amuse themselves or dispute for gain, or let these poor baubles be reserved for the Senate, where men will defend or denounce according as it suits their party. It is not ours to make the worse appear the better

reason, or to hide the truth under floods of words. As for us, we are to hide ourselves behind the cross, and make men know that Jesus Christ came to save the lost, and that if they believe in Him they shall be saved at once and forever. If we do not make them know this we have missed our mark, however grandly we have performed. What, shall we become acrobats with words, or jugglers displaying wonders? Then God is insulted, His gospel is degraded, and souls are left to perish.

I venture to put in a word for myself, and then leave this point. I can say with the apostle, “I have used great plainness of speech,” and therefore if the gospel which I have preached is hidden, I have not produced the veil. I have used vulgar words when I thought that they would be better understood, and I have told all sorts of simple stories when I thought I could make the gospel known. I have never used a hard word where I could help it. My one desire has been by manifesting the truth to touch your consciences, and win your hearts. If you see not the light, it is not because I have hidden it from you.

IV. With this we close. IF THE GOSPEL IS VEILED TO OUR HEARERS, IT IS A FATAL SIGN. “If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.” The god of this world has blinded their unbelieving eyes lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should dawn upon them. Not to believe, understand, appreciate, and accept the gospel is a sign of perishing. I want to put this very plainly to any here who say that they have not received the gospel because they cannot understand it, and they see nothing remarkable in it. If you have heard it plainly preached, it is so plain in itself that if it is hid from your eyes it is because you are still in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity. You who receive the gospel are saved, faith is the saving token. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, you are born of God, if you have accepted Him as your Savior whom God sets forth as such, then, you are saved. But if you say, “No,

I cannot see it,” then your eyes are blinded and you are lost. The sun is bright enough, but those who have no sight are not enlightened. Do you say, “I cannot receive the gospel, I need something more difficult”? By sinful pride your judgment is perverted and your heart is hardened. While you are among the unbelieving you are still among the perishing, and the god of this world blindfolds you. O, Spirit of God, convince men of this sin that they believe not on Jesus Christ. This work is out of Your servant’s power, but, oh, You perform it. Oh that our text, like a sharp knife, may cut deep and reach the conscience. May this truth pierce between the joints and marrow, and discern the thoughts and intents of your hearts.

According to the text, he that believes not on Jesus Christ is a lost man. God has lost you, you are not His servant. The church has lost you; you are not working for the truth. The world has lost you really; you yield no lasting service to it. You have lost yourself to right, to joy, to heaven. You are lost, lost, lost, like the prodigal son when he was away from his father’s house, and like the sheep that went astray from the fold. It is not only that you *will be* lost, but that you *are* lost, for “He that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed on the Son of God.” Press those two words upon your conscience—“Condemned already”—lost even now. You are perishing, that is to say, you are gradually passing into that condition in which you must abide forever, as one that has perished before God, and become utterly useless and dead. It is an appalling truth that this is proved by the fact that you do not understand the gospel, or if you understand it, you do not appreciate it, you do not see beauty or glory in it, or if you do in a measure appreciate it, and see some glory in it, yet it has never stirred your affection or drawn your heart towards its great subject. In a word, you have not come to trust in Jesus. He is the only one that you can trust to, and yet you reject Him.

It must be the simplest thing in the entire world to trust in Christ, and yet you will not do that simple thing. Trust in Him should be attended to at once, and ought not to be delayed, and yet you have delayed for years. If faith brings salvation, why not have salvation? Why abide still in unbelief—in unbelief of the most glorious truth that God Himself ever revealed to men—in unbelief of that which you dare not deny? Oh, what a condition to be in, willfully in darkness, shutting your eyes to the light. You are certainly lost.

The apostle explains how a man gets into that condition. He says that Satan, the god of this world, has blinded his mind. What a thought it is that Satan should set up to be a god. Christ is the image of God; Satan is the imitator of God. He mimics God, and holds a usurped power over men's minds and thoughts. To maintain his power, he takes great care that his dupes should not see the light of the gospel. The veils he uses are such as men's selfish hearts approve, for he speaks thus, "If you were to become a Christian, you would never get on in the world." He claps a sovereign on each eye, and then you cannot see, though the sun shines at midday. Pride binds a silken band across the eyes, and thus again the light is excluded. Satan whispers, "If you become a Christian, you will be laughed at," thus he hoodwinks his victim with fear of ridicule. He has many a crafty device by which he perverts the human judgment till they cannot see that which is self-evident, and will not believe that which is unquestionable. He makes the gain of heaven to seem inconsiderable when weighed with the little loss which religion may involve. He hides from the soul the bliss of forgiven sin, of adoption into God's family, and the certainty of eternal glory, by throwing dust into the eyes, so that the mind cannot look at things truthfully.

What shall I say in closing but this, are you lost, any of you? Upon the showing of the text all of you are to whom the gospel

is hidden. Well, but thank God you may be found yet, lost today, but you need not be lost tomorrow, lost while sitting in these pews, but you may be found before you leave the Tabernacle. The Good Shepherd has come out to find the lost sheep. Have you any desire after Him, any wish to return to Him? Then look to Him with a trustful glance. You are not lost if so you look, nor shall you ever be. He that believes in Jesus is saved, and saved eternally. Are any of you blinded? You must be so if the gospel is hid from you, so that you cannot see its brightness. Ah, but you need not remain in the dark. There is One abroad today who opens blind eyes. Cry to Him as did the two blind men, “You Son of David, have mercy on me! You Son of David, have mercy on me!” The Messiah came on purpose to give sight to the blind; it was a part of His commission when He came forth from the Father’s glory. He will give sight to you. Oh seek it.

Is the god of this world your master? He must be if you do not see the glory of the gospel, but he need not be your god any longer. I pray the Holy Spirit to help you to dethrone this intruder. Why should you adore him? What good has he ever done for you? What is there about his character that makes him worthy to be your god? Break off his yoke; burst the fetters which now hold you his slave. The true God has come in the flesh to set you free, and to destroy all the works of the devil. Whatever keeps you from beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ can be removed. I am sent to say in my Master’s name, “Whoever believes in Him is not condemned: he that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” “Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Trust the Savior, trust the incarnate God, trust Him now and trust Him at once, and though a moment ago you were black as hell’s midnight, you

shall be clean and bright as heaven's eternal noon. In one instant, sins that have taken you 50 years to accumulate shall disappear. The transgressions of all your days shall be plunged beneath the sea, and shall be found no more. Only be willing and obedient, and yield yourselves up to the incarnate God, who always lives to take care of those who put their trust in Him. May the Lord bless you, dear friends, forevermore. Amen and amen.

1664 “JEHOVAH-ROPHI” – EXOD. 15:26

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, June 11, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“I am the LORD that heals you.” — Exodus 15:26

*[Scripture Read before Sermon – Exodus 15:20-27;
Psalm 103:1-13; Psalm 121]*

WE SHALL CONSIDER this passage in its context, for I have no doubt that the miracle at Marah was intended to be a very instructive illustration of the glorious title which is here claimed by the covenant God of Israel—“I am JEHOVAH-Rophi, the LORD that heals you.” The illustration introduces the sermon of which this verse is the text. The healing of the bitter waters is the parable of which the line before us is the lesson.

How different is the Lord to His foes and to His friends. His presence is light to Israel and darkness to Egypt. Egypt only knew JEHOVAH as the Lord that plagues and destroys those who refuse to obey Him. Is not this the Lord’s memorial in Egypt that He cut Rahab and wounded the dragon? He overthrew their armies at the Red Sea, and drowned their hosts beneath the waves, but to His own people, in themselves but very little superior to the Egyptians, God is not the terrible avenger consuming His adversaries, but “JEHOVAH that heals you.” Their mental and moral diseases were almost as great as

those of the Egyptians whom the Lord cut off from before Him, but He spared His chosen for His covenant's sake.

He bared the sword of justice against rebellious Pharaoh, and then He turned His tender, healing hand upon His own people, to exercise towards them the heavenly surgery of His grace. Israel knew Him as the Lord that heals, and Egypt knew Him as the Lord that smites. Let us adore the grace which makes so wide a difference, the sovereign grace which brings salvation unto Israel, and let us confess our own personal obligations to the mercy which has not dealt with *us* after our sins, nor rewarded *us* according to our iniquities.

Again, how differently does God deal with His own people from what we should have expected. He is a God of surprises, He does things which we looked not for. God deals with us not according to our conception of His ways, but according to His own wisdom and prudence, for as the heavens are high above the earth, so high are His thoughts above our thoughts. You would not have supposed that a people for whom God had given Egypt as a ransom would have been led into the wilderness of Shur, neither would you have guessed that a people so near to Him that He cleft the sea and made them walk between two glassy walls dry shod, would have been left for three days without water.

You naturally expect to see the chosen tribes brought right speedily into a condition of comfort, or, if there must be a journey ere they reach the land that flows with milk and honey, you look at once for the smitten rock and the flowing stream, the manna and the quails, and all the other things which they can desire. How singular it seems that after having done such a great marvel for them the Lord should cause them to thirst beneath a burning sky, and that too when they were quite unprepared for it, being quite new to desert privations, having

lived so long by the river of Egypt, where they drank of sweet water without stint.

We read at other times, "You, LORD, did send a plenteous rain, whereby you did refresh your inheritance when it was weary," but here we meet with no showers, no brooks gushed forth below, and no rain dropped from above. Three days without water is a severe trial when the burning sand is below and the blazing sky is above. Yet the Lord's people in some way or other are sure to be tried, theirs is no holiday parade, but a stern march by a way which flesh and blood would never have chosen.

The Egyptians found enough water, and even too much of it, for they were drowned in the sea, but the well-beloved Israelites had no water at all. So is it with the wicked man, he often has enough of wealth, and too much of it, till he is drowned in sensual delights and perishes in floods of prosperity. He has his portion in this life, and in that portion he is lost, like Pharaoh in the proud waters. Full often the Lord's people are made to know the pinch of poverty, their lives are made wretched by sore bondage, and they faint for a morsel of bread, they drink from a bitter fountain, which fills their inward parts with gall and wormwood. They are afflicted very much, almost to the breaking of their hearts.

One of them said, "All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning." They lie at the rich man's gate full of sores, while the ungodly man is clothed in scarlet, and fares sumptuously every day. This is God's strange way of dealing with His own people. He Himself has said, "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." "He scourges every son whom he receives." Thus He made His people know that the wilderness was not their rest, nor their home, for they could not even find such a common necessary as water wherewith to quench their thirst.

He made them understand that the promised brooks that flowed with milk and honey were not in the wilderness, but must be found on the other side of Jordan, in the land which God had given to their fathers, and they must journey thither with weary feet. “This is not your rest,” was the lesson of their parched lips in the three-day march.

You know what teaching there is in all this, for your experience answers to it. Do not marvel, beloved, if with all your joy over your vanquished sin, which shall be seen by you no more forever, you yet have to lament your present grievous want. The children of Israel cried, “What shall we drink?” This was a wretched sequel to, “Sing unto the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously.”

Have you never made the same descent? If you are in poverty you are, no doubt, tempted to put that trinity of questions, “What shall we eat? What shall we drink? And with what shall we be clothed?” You are not the first to whom this temptation has happened. Do not marvel at all if up from the triumph of the Red Sea, with a song in your mouth and a timbrel in your hand, you ascend into the great and terrible wilderness, and enter upon the land of drought. This way lies Canaan and this way you must go. Through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom, and therefore let us set our minds to it.

By this grievous test the Lord was proving His people, and causing them to see what was in their hearts. They would have known no wilderness without if there had not been a wilderness within, neither had there been a drought of water for their mouths if the Lord had not seen a drought of grace in their souls. We are fine birds till our feathers are ruffled, and then what a poor figure we cut! We are just a mass of diseases and a bundle of disorders, and unless grace prevents, we are the sure

prey of death. O Lord, we pray to be proved, but we little know what it means!

Let this suffice for an introduction, and then let our text come in with comfort to our hearts, "I am the LORD that heals you." It was to illustrate this great name of God that the tribes were brought into so painful a condition, and indeed all the experience of a believer is meant to glorify God, that the believer himself may see more of God, and that the world outside may also behold the glory of the Lord. Therefore the Lord leads His people up and down in the wilderness, and therefore He makes them cry out because there is no water, all to make them behold His power, and His goodness, and His wisdom. Our lives are the canvas upon which the Lord paints His own character.

We shall try, this morning to set forth before you, by the help of the divine Spirit, this grand character of God, that He is the God that heals us. First, we shall notice *the healing of our circumstances*, dwelling upon that in order the better to set forth the greater fact, "I am the LORD that heals *you*." Secondly, we shall remember *the healing of our bodies* which is here promised to obedient Israel, and we shall set forth that truth, in order to bring out our third point, which is *the healing of our souls*, "I am the LORD that heals *you*,"—not your circumstances only, nor your bodily diseases only, but yourself, your soul, your truest self, for there is the worst bitterness, there is the sorest disease, and there shall the grandest power of God be shown to you, and to all who know you.

I. THE GLORIOUS JEHOVAH SHOWS HIS HEALING POWER UPON OUR CIRCUMSTANCES.

The fainting Israelites thought that when they came to Marah they should slake their thirst. Often enough the mirage had mocked them as it does all thirsty travelers, they thought that they saw before them flowing rivers and palm trees, but as

they rushed forward they found nothing but sand, for the mirage was deluding them. At last, however, the waters of Marah were fairly within sight, and they were not a delusion, here was real water, and they were sure of it. No doubt they rushed forward helter-skelter, each man eager to drink, and what must have been their disappointment when they found that they could not endure it. A thirsty man will drink almost anything, but this water was so bitter that it was impossible for them to receive it.

I do not read that they had murmured all the three days of their thirsty march, but this disappointment was too much for them. The relief which seemed so near was snatched away, the cup was dashed from their lips, and they began to murmur against Moses, and so in truth against God. Here was the proof of their imperfection, they were impatient and unbelieving. Have we not too often fallen into the same sin?

Brethren, let your conscience answer! When you have felt a sharp affliction, and it has continued a long time, and you have been wearied out with it, you have at last seen a prospect of escape, but that prospect has completely failed you. What woe is this! When the friend you so surely relied upon tells you that he can do nothing, when the physician upon whom you put such reliance informs you that his medicine has not touched the malady, when the last expedient that you could adopt to save yourself from bankruptcy, the last arrow in your quiver has missed the mark—how your spirit has sunk within you in dire despair! Then your heart has begun to wound itself, like the scorpion, with its own sting. You have felt as if you were utterly spent and ready for the grave. The last trial was too much for you, you could bear up no longer. Happy have you been if under such conditions you have not been left to give way to murmuring against God.

These poor Israelites were in a very pitiable condition. There was the water before them, but its horrible flavor made them shrink from a second taste. Have you not experienced the same? You have obtained that which you thought would deliver you, but it has not helped you. You looked for light, and beheld darkness, for refreshment, and beheld an aggravated grief. The springs of earth are brackish until JEHOVAH heals them, they increase the thirst of the man who too eagerly drinks of them. "Cursed is he that trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm."

Now, dear friends, in answer to prayer God has often healed your bitter waters and made them sweet. I am about to appeal to your personal experience, you that are truly pilgrims under the guidance of your heavenly Lord. Has it not been so with you? I should have no difficulty in refreshing your memories about Marah, for very likely its bitterness is in your mouth even now, and you cannot forget your sorrow. But just now I wish to refresh your memories about what came of that sorrow. Did not God deliver you? Did He not, when you cried to Him, come to your rescue? I appeal to facts, which may be stubborn things, but they are also rich encouragements.

Has not the Lord oftentimes made our bitter waters sweet *by changing our circumstances altogether*? When the poor in heart have been oppressed, God has taken away the oppressor, or else taken the heart away from the oppression. When you have been in great straits and could not see which way to steer, has not the Lord Jesus seemed to open before you a wider channel, or Himself to steer your vessel through all the intricacies of the narrow river, and bring you where you would come? Have you not noticed in your lives that most remarkable changes have taken place at times when anguish took hold upon you? I can bear my witness, if you cannot, that the Lord has great healing power in the matter of our trials and griefs. He has changed my

circumstances in providence, and in many ways altered the whole aspect of affairs.

On other occasions the Lord has not removed the circumstances, and yet He has turned sorrow into joy, for He has *put into them a new ingredient*, which has acted as an antidote to the acrid flavor of your affliction. You were not allowed to leave the shop, but there came a fresh manager, who shielded you from persecution; you were not permitted to quit your business, but there came a wonderful improvement in your trade, and this reconciled you to the long hours. You were not made to be perfectly healthy, but you were helped to a medicine which much assuaged the sharpness of the pain, thus has your Marah been sweetened.

Have you not found it so? The weight of your affliction was exceedingly great, but the Lord found a counterbalance, and by placing a weight of holy joy in the other scale He lifted up your load, and its weight was virtually taken away. You have been at Marah, but even there you have been able to drink, for a something has been put into the waters of afflictive providence which has made them endurable.

And where this has not been done, the Lord has by a heavenly art made your bitter waters sweet *by giving you more satisfaction with the divine will*, more submission, and more acquiescence in what the Lord has ordained. After all, this is the most effectual remedy. If I cannot bring my circumstances to my mind, yet if God helps me to bring my mind to my circumstances, the matter is made right. There is a degree of sweetness about pain, and poverty, and shame when once you feel, "The loving Lord ordained all this for me, my tribulation is of His appointing." Then the soul, feeling that the affliction comes from a Father's hand, accepts it, and kicks against the pricks no longer. Surely, then, the bitterness of life or of death will be past when the mind is subdued to the Eternal will.

These people said, "What shall we drink?" and they would have concluded that Moses was mocking them if he had answered, "You shall drink the bitter water." They would have said, "We cannot bear it, we remember the sweet water of the Nile, and we cannot endure this nauseous stuff." But Moses would have said, "Yes, you will drink that, and nothing else but that, and it will become to you all that you want." Even so, beloved, you may have quarreled with your circumstances, and said, "I must have a change, I cannot longer bear this trial." Has not the Lord of His grace changed your mind, and so influenced your will that you have really found comfort in that which was uncomfortable and content in that which made you discontented?

Have you never said when under tribulation, "I could not have believed it, I am perfectly happy under my trial, and yet when I looked forward to it I dreaded it beyond measure. I said it would be the death of me, but now I find that by these things men live, and in all this is the life of my spirit"? We exclaim with Jacob, "All these things are against me," but the Lord gives us more grace, and we see that all things work together for good, and we bless the Lord for His afflicting hand. So you see the Lord JEHOVAH heals our bitter waters, and makes our circumstances endurable to our sanctified minds.

Brethren, all this which you have experienced should be to you a proof of God's power to make everything that is bitter sweet. The depravity of your nature will yet yield to the operations of His grace, the corruptions that are within you will yet be subdued, and you shall enter into the fullest communion with God in Christ Jesus.

I know you shall, because the Lord is unchangeable in power, and what He has done in one direction He can and will do in another. Your circumstances were so terrible, and yet God helped you, and now your sins, your inbred sins, which

are so dreadful, He will help you against them, and give you power over them. You shall overcome the power of evil, by His grace you shall be sanctified, and you shall manifest the sweetness of holiness instead of the bitterness of self.

Can you believe it? Does not God's power exhibited in providence around you prove that He has power enough to do great things within you by His grace? Moreover, should not this healing of your circumstances be to you a pledge that God will heal you as to your inner spirit? He that brought you through the sea and drowned your enemies will also drown your sins, till you shall sing, "The depths have covered them: there is not one of them left." He that turned your Marah into sweetness will yet turn all your sense of sin into a sense of pardon, all the bitterness of your regret and the sharpness of your repentance shall yet be turned into the joy of faith, and you shall be full of delight in the perfect reconciliation which comes by the precious blood of Christ.

Sustaining providences are to the saints sure pledges of grace. The sweetened water is a picture of a sweetened nature, I had almost said it is a type of it. God binds Himself by the gracious deliverances of His providence to give you equal deliverances of grace. It is joyous to say, "He is the Lord that healed my circumstances," but how much better to sing of His name as "The LORD that heals *you*." Do not be contented till you reach to that, but do be confident that He who healed Marah will heal you, He that has helped you to rejoice in Him in all your times of trouble will sustain you in all your struggles with sin, till you shall more sweetly and more loudly praise His blessed name.

II. Let us now proceed a step further. As we have spoken of God's healing our circumstances, so now we have to think of **THE LORD'S HEALING OUR BODIES.**

Why are diseases and pains left in the bodies of God's people? Our bodies are redeemed, for Christ has redeemed our entire manhood, but if Christ be in us, the body is still dead because of sin, even though the spirit is alive because of righteousness. It is not till the resurrection that we shall enjoy the full result of the redemption of the body. Resurrection will accomplish for our bodies what regeneration has done for our souls. We were born again. Ay, but that divine work was exercised only upon our spiritual nature, our bodies were not born again, hence they still abide under the liability of disease, decay, and death, though even these evils have been turned into blessings.

This frail, sensitive, and earthly frame, which Paul calls "this vile body," grows weary and worn, and by and by, it will fade away and die, unless the Lord shall come, and even if He should come this feeble fabric must be totally changed, for flesh and blood as they now are cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither can corruption dwell with incorruption. Even unto this day the body is under death because of sin, and is left so on purpose to remind us of the effects of sin, that we may feel within ourselves what sin has done, and may the better guess at what sin would have done if we had remained under it, for the pains of hell would have been ours forever.

These griefs of body are meant, I say, to make us recollect what we owe to the redemption of our Lord Jesus, and so to keep us humble and grateful. Aches and pains are also sent to keep us on the wing for heaven, even as thorns in the nest drive the bird from its sloth. They make us long for the land where the inhabitant shall no more say, "I am sick."

Yet the Lord does heal our bodies. First He heals them *by preventing sickness*. Prevention is better than cure. The text says, "If you will diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD your God, and will do that which is right in His sight, and will give

ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon you, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that heals you.”

It is concerning this selfsame healing Lord that we read, “You shall not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flies by day; nor for the pestilence that walks in darkness; nor for the destruction that wastes at noonday. A thousand shall fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come nigh you. Only with your eyes shall you behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because you have made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, your habitation; there shall no evil befall you, neither shall any plague come nigh your dwelling.”

Do we sufficiently praise God for guarding us from disease? I am afraid that His preserving care is often forgotten. Men will go thirty or forty years almost without an illness, and forget the Lord in consequence. That which should secure gratitude creates indifference. When we have been ill we come up to the house of the Lord and desire to return thanks because of our recovery, ought we not to give thanks when we are not ill, and do not need to be recovered? Should it not be to you healthy folks a daily cause of gratitude to God that He keeps away those pains which would keep you awake all night, and wards off those sicknesses which would cause your beauty to consume away like the moth?

But we see this healing hand of the Lord more conspicuously when, like Hezekiah, we have been sick, and have been restored. Sometimes we lie helpless and hopeless like dust ready to return to its fellow dust, we are incapable of exertion, and ready to be dissolved. Then if the Lord renews our youth and takes away our sickness, we do praise His name, and so we ought, for it is not the doctor; it is not the medicine—these are but the outward means, it is the Lord who

is the true Physician, and unto JEHOVAH-Rophi be the praise. "I am the LORD that heals you." Let those of us that have been laid aside, and have been again allowed to walk abroad, lift up our hearts and our voices in thanksgiving to the Lord who forgives all our iniquities, who heals all our diseases.

According to the analogy of the healing of Marah, the Lord does this by means, for He cast a tree into the water. Those who will use no medicine whatever certainly have no Scriptural warrant for their conduct. Even where cures are given to faith, yet the apostle says, "Is any sick? Let him send for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." The anointing with oil was the proper medicine of the day, and possibly a great deal better medicine than some of the drugs which are used nowadays. To the use of this anointing the promise is given, "and the prayer of faith shall raise the sick."

Hezekiah was miraculously healed, but the Lord said, "Take a lump of figs, and lay it upon the sore." God could have spoken a word and turned Marah sweet, but He did not choose to do so, He would exercise the faith and obedience of His people by bidding them cast a tree into the waters. The use of means is not to hinder faith, but to try it. Still, it is the Lord who works the cure, and this is the point which is so often forgotten.

Oh, come let us sing unto JEHOVAH who has said—"I am the LORD that heals you." Do not attribute to secondary means that which ought to be ascribed to God alone. His fresh air, and warm sun, or bracing wind, and refreshing showers do more for our healing than we dream of, or if medicine be used, it is He who gives virtue to the drugs, and so by His own Almighty hand works out our cure. As one who has felt His restoring hand, I will personally sing unto Him who is the health of my countenance and my God.

Note this, that in every healing of which we are the subjects we have a pledge of the resurrection. Every time a man who is near the gates of death rises up again he enjoys a kind of rehearsal of that grand rising when from beds of dust and silent clay the perfect saints shall rise at the trumpet of the archangel and the voice of God. We ought to gather from our restorations from serious and perilous sickness a proof that the God who brings us back from the gates of the grave can also bring us back from the grave itself whenever it shall be His time to do so.

This should also be a yet further proof to us that if He can heal our bodies the Lord can heal our souls. If this poor worm's meat, which so readily decays, can be revived, so can the soul which is united to Christ and quickened with His life, and if the Almighty Lord can cast out evils from this poor dust and ashes, which must ultimately be dissolved, much more can He cast out all manner of evils from that immaterial spirit which is yet to shine in the brightness of the glory of God. Therefore both from His healing your woes and from His healing your bodies, gather power to believe in the fact that He will heal your mental, moral, and spiritual diseases, and already lift up your hearts with joy as you sing of JEHOVAH -Rophi, "The LORD that heals YOU."

"Sinners of old Thou did receive,
With comfortable words and kind,
Their sorrows cheer, their needs relieve,
Heal the diseased, and cure the blind,

And art Thou not the Savior still,
In every place and age the same?
Have Thou forgot Thy gracious skill,
Or lost the virtue of Thy name?

Faith in Thy changeless name I have;
The good, the kind Physician,
Thou Art able now our souls to save,
Art willing to restore them now.

Though eighteen hundred years are past
Since Thou did in the flesh appear,
Thy tender mercies ever last;
And still Thy healing power is here!

Would Thou the body's health restore,
And not regard the sin-sick soul?
The sin-sick soul Thou lov'st much more,
And surely Thou shall make it whole."

The healing of Marah and the healing of the body are placed before the text, and they shed a light upon it. They place this name of the Lord in a golden frame, and cause us to look upon it with the greater interest.

III. Now we come to THE HEALING OF OUR SOULS.

The Lord our God will heal our spirits, and He will do it in somewhat the same manner as that in which He healed Marah. How was that? First, He made the people know how bitter Marah was. There was no healing for that water till they had tasted it, and discovered that it was too brackish to be endured, but after they knew its bitterness then the Lord made it sweet to them. So is it with your sin, my brother. It must become more and more bitter to you. You will have to cry out, "O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" You will have to feel that you cannot live upon anything that is within yourself. The creature must be made distasteful to you, and all trusts that come of it, for God's way is first to kill, and then to make alive;

first to wound, and then to heal. He begins by making Marah to be Marah, and afterwards He makes it sweet.

What next? The next thing was there was prayer offered. I do not know whether any of the people possessed faith in God, but if so, they had a prayerless faith, and God does not work in answer to prayerless faith. “Oh,” says one, “I am perfectly sanctified.” How do you know? “Because I believe I am.” That will never do. Is a man rich because he believes he is? Will sickness vanish if I believe myself to be well? Some even think it useless to pray because they feel sure of having the blessing.

That putting aside of prayer is a dangerous piece of business altogether. If there is not the cry to God for the blessing, ay, and the daily cry for keeping and for sanctification, the mercy will not come. Again, I say, healing comes not to a prayerless faith. You may believe what you like, but God will only hear you when you pray. Faith must pour itself out in prayer before the blessing will be poured into the soul. Moses cried, and he obtained the blessing, the people did not cry, and they would have been in an evil case had it not been for Moses. We must come to crying and praying before we shall receive sanctification, which is the making whole of our spirits.

Marah became sweet through the introduction of something outside of itself—a tree, I know not of what kind. The rabbis say that it was a bitter tree, and naturally tended to make the water more bitter still. However that may be, I cannot imagine any tree in all the world, bitter or sweet, which could have power to sweeten such a quantity of water as must have been at Marah. The transaction was miraculous, and the tree was used merely as the instrument, and no further.

But I do know a tree which, if put into the soul, will sweeten all its thoughts and desires, and Jesus knew that tree, that tree whereon He died and shed His blood as a victim for our sin. If the merit of the cross is imputed to us, and the spirit

of the cross is introduced into our nature, if we trust the Lord Jesus, and rest upon Him, ay, if we become cross-bearers, and our soul is crucified to the world, then we shall find a marvelous change of our entire nature.

Whereas we were full of vice, the Crucified One will make us full of virtue, and whereas we were bitter towards God, we shall be sweet to Him, and even Christ will be refreshed as He drinks of our love, as He drinks of our trust, as He drinks of our joy in Him. Where all was acrid, sharp, and poisonous, everything shall become pure, delicious, and refreshing. We must first experience a sense of bitterness, then cry out to the Lord in prayer, and then yield an obedient faith which puts the unlikely tree into the stream, and then the divine power shall be put forth upon us by Him who says, "I am the LORD that heals you."

The inner healing is set forth as in a picture in the sweetening of the bitter pools of Marah. I know I am right in saying so, because we are told of Moses, "There he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them."

Again the task of turning Marah sweet was a very difficult one. No human power could have achieved it, and even so the task of changing our nature is not only difficult, but impossible to us. We must be born again, not of the will of man, nor of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God. There was no turning Marah sweet by any means within the reach of Moses or the myriads that came up with him out of Egypt. This wonder must come from JEHOVAH's hand. So is the change of our nature a thing beyond all human might. Who can make his own heart clean? God must work this marvel. We must be born again from above, or else we shall remain in the gall of bitterness even unto the end.

But yet the work was very easy to God. How simple a thing it was just to take a tree and cast it into the bitter water and find

it sweet at once. Even so it is an easy thing to God to make us a new heart, and a right spirit and so to incline us to everything that is right and good. What a blessing is this! If I had to make myself holy I must despair and if I had to make myself perfect and keep myself so it would never be done. But the Lord JEHOVAH can do it, and has already begun to do it. Things which I once hated I now love, all things have become new. Simple faith in Jesus Christ, the putting of the cross into the stream, does it all, and does it at once too, and does it so effectually that there is no return of the bitterness, but the heart remains sweet and pure before the living God.

The task was completely accomplished. The people came and drank of Marah just as freely as they afterwards drank of Elim or of the water that leaped from the smitten rock. So God can and will complete in us the change of our nature. Paul says, "I am persuaded that he that has begun a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ." The Lord has not begun to sweeten us a little with the intent of leaving us in a half healed condition, but He will continue the process till we are without trace of defilement, and made pure and right in His sight.

This work is one which greatly glorifies God. If the change of Marah's water made the people praise God, much more will the change of nature make us adore Him forever and ever. We are going to be exalted, brethren, by and by, to the highest place in the universe next to God. Man, poor sinful man, is to be so changed as to be able to stand side by side with Christ, who has for that very purpose taken upon Himself human nature.

We are to be above the angels. The highest seraphim shall be less privileged than the heirs of salvation. Now, the tendency to pride would be very strong upon us, only that we shall always recollect what we used to be, and what power it was that has made us what we are. This will make it safe for God to glorify His people. There will be no fear of our sullyng God's honor,

or setting ourselves up in opposition to Him, as did Lucifer of old. It shall never be said of any spirit washed in the precious blood of Jesus, "How are you fallen from heaven, O son of the morning?" for the process through which we shall pass in turning our bitterness to sweetness will fill us with perpetual adoration, and with constant reverence of the unspeakably mighty grace of God.

Will it not be so, brethren? Do not your impulses even now lead you to feel that, when you gain your promised crowns, the first thing you will joyfully do will be to cast them at the feet of Jesus, and say, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto your name be glory forever and ever"? That sweetened Marah was all of God, our renewed nature shall be all of God. We shall not be able to take the slightest particle of credit to ourselves, nor shall we wish to do so.

Brethren, the Lord will do it, He will be sure to do it because it will glorify His name. Let us draw comfort from this fact, there will be no interfering with the Lord by a rival claimant to honor, no idolatry in us taking away part of His praises, therefore He will do it, and change our bitterness into perfect sweetness. Blessed be His name, He can do it, nothing will baffle the skill of "the LORD that heals you."

Whenever I am cast down under a sense of corruption, I always like to get a hold of this divine name, "The LORD that heals you." "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." "Faithful is he that has called you, who also will do it," says the apostle. He has not undertaken what He will fail to perform. JEHOVAH, who made heaven and earth, has undertaken to make us perfect, and to effectually heal us, therefore let us be confident that it will assuredly be accomplished, and we shall be presented without spot before God.

He who heals us is a God so glorious that He will certainly perform the work. There is none like unto the Omnipotent One! He is able to subdue all things unto Himself. His wisdom, power, and grace can so work upon us that where sin abounded grace shall much more abound.

“Thou canst o’ercome this heart of mine;
Thou wilt victorious prove;
For everlasting strength is Thine,
And everlasting love.

Thy powerful Spirit shall subdue
Unconquerable sin;
Cleanse this foul heart, and make it new,
And write Thy law within.”

He is a God who loves us so, and makes us so precious in His sight, that He gave Egypt for our ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for us. A God so loving will surely perfect that which concerns us. Moreover, a God so fond of purity, a God who hates sin so intensely, and who loves righteousness so fervently will surely cleanse the blood of His own children. He must and will make His own family pure. “This people have I formed for myself: they shall show forth my praise.” The devil cannot hinder that decree. “They shall,” says God, and they shall, too, whatever shall stand in their way. They must and they shall show forth God’s praise.

Now, as you have believed in God for your justification and found it in Christ, so believe in God for your sanctification, that He will work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure, that He will exterminate in you the very roots of sin, that He will make you like Himself, without taint or speck, and that, as surely as you are trusting in Christ, you shall

be whiter than snow, pure as the infinite JEHOVAH, and you shall stand with His Firstborn, accepted in the Beloved.

My soul seems to grasp this, and to hold it all the more firmly because the Lord has turned my bitter circumstances into sweetness, and He has healed the sickness of my body. Because of these former mercies, I know that He will heal the sickness of my spirit, and I shall be whole, that is to say holy, without spot or trace of sin, and so shall I be forever with the Lord. "Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

Brethren, if the Lord has taken you into His hospital and healed you, do not forget other sick folk. Freely you have received, freely give. Give today to the hospitals in which so many of the poor are cared for and succored. Do it for Jesus' sake, and may the Lord accept your offerings.

1665 THE EXCEEDING RICHES OF GRACE – EPHESIANS 2:7

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, June 18, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding
riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ
Jesus. — Ephesians 2:7

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Ephesian 2]

FROM THIS VERSE, it is clear that Paul fully expected the gospel of the grace of God to be preached in the ages to come. He had no notion of a temporary gospel to develop into a better, but he was assured that the same gospel would be preached to the end of the dispensation. Nor this alone, for as I take it, he looked to the perpetuity of the gospel, not only through the ages which have already elapsed since the first advent of our blessed Lord, but throughout the ages after He shall have come a second time. Eternity itself will not improve upon the gospel. When all the saints shall be gathered home they shall still talk and speak of the wonders of Jehovah's love in Christ Jesus. And in the golden streets they shall stand up and tell what the Lord has done for them to listening crowds of angels, and principalities, and powers.

Paul did not believe in the quenching of the light of the testimony of grace, but expected that throughout the ages to

come it would burn on with the selfsame brilliance. This I infer from the fact that he looked upon the believing Ephesians and himself as having been converted in the dawn of Christianity, on purpose, that to later ages they might serve as specimens of what the gospel can do. He looked upon these Ephesians, newly drawn out from the cesspool of idolatry, in the same light as he looked upon himself when he said that, the Lord had shown towards him all long-suffering, for a pattern to them that should hereafter believe on His name.

Paul and these Ephesians, and all those early Christians, were types to us of what God can do by the gospel and of what He will continue to do until the present dispensation shall close. From this statement we may gather with most sure logic that the gospel is altogether unalterable, for if its results 1,800 years ago are to serve us as proofs of its power, then it must be the same gospel. It is clear that the converts of the first century would not be to us any kind of testimony to the power of the gospel as it now exists among us if meanwhile there had been a change in the gospel itself. At best such facts could only show what the old-fashioned gospel did in its day, but we could not infer from them what a new-fangled gospel will now accomplish. Paul did not at all anticipate any removal of the old landmarks. He held it forth that the same results would follow in all ages from the preaching of the same gospel with the same power from heaven, and therefore he regarded the first converts as pledges and proofs to all succeeding ages of what the gospel could achieve. Hold, my brethren, to that gospel which has been delivered unto you, which we have received by the Spirit of God through the teaching of Christ and of His apostles, and you shall yet see repeated in your midst the same things which were worked in those early days. Those who will, may drink the new wine of the modern vintage, my conviction is that the old is better.

Learn also from this language of Paul, that every age is a gainer by those which preceded it. I have smiled often in this place at the conceit of this nineteenth century, which holds up its head among the ages as far excelling them all, though if it knew itself it would sing to a more modest tune. But now I will moderate my tone, and admit that this century is superior to all the ages that have been before it—superior in this one respect, that it has received by the lapse of time the fullest and most repeated evidence of the gospel's power.

Whereas in the second century men could only refer to the experience of the saints during one hundred years, we have at this hour the accumulated evidence of almost nineteen thousand years, and all this is put in evidence as proof of what grace can do. Whereas in the third, fourth, and fifth centuries men had the accumulated personal testimonies of those who had till then, believed in Christ, and had been saved thereby, we, upon whom the ends of the earth have come, have now far larger evidence, because the time has supplied us with a greater cloud of witnesses. For nearly two thousand years this gospel has been preached among men. And every year has brought fresh trophies to its power, every day, I might say, is now producing evidence of its divine power.

We have not today, dear friends, to begin to test the gospel. The ice is broken for us, experiments have been made so frequently that we have now entered upon another stage. It is not ours to analyze the bread, but to feed upon it. We have not today to inquire, "Can we ford the stream?" Lo, these nineteen centuries the hosts of God have gone through the flood in safety, and we have but to join their ranks and follow where they lead the way. Surrounded by evidence that is altogether overwhelming, we behold the gospel of Jesus going forth, conquering and to conquer. We hear from ten thousand times ten thousand voices the cry, "Christ is the power of God and

the wisdom of God.” We cannot cease to proclaim the mercy of God as displayed in the atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus, for infallible assurances strengthen our confidence and set our hearts on fire.

The multitudes of converts in past time make known to us in these ages that there is salvation, no, more, that this salvation is to be had, for they obtained it. No, further, that it is to be had upon the terms that God has laid down of simply believing in Jesus Christ, for they obtained it in that way and in none other. Doubt ought now to be out of the question. Every needy, trembling sinner should hasten away to the refuge supplied by Jesus. Because so many have been to Him with success, because He has never rejected any, because He has saved to the uttermost all those that have come to Him, therefore sinful men ought eagerly and unquestioningly to come at once, and put their confidence in the Lamb of God. Then will God’s purpose, as described in the text, be accomplished, that to the ages to come should be made known by all who have tasted of His kindness the exceeding riches of His grace toward men in Christ Jesus the Savior.

This morning, I have a text before me which is a great deal too full for me. I can never draw out all its supplies. I have gone around the walls of this city text, I have counted its towers and marked well its bulwarks, and I am utterly unable to express myself by reason of joyous astonishment. I feel as if I must sit down and lose myself in adoration. I am a poor dumb dog over such a theme. I believe that if I were shut up to preach for twelve months from this text, I should not be straitened for matter, but rather, when I had finished the fifty-two Sabbaths, I should be eager to enter upon another year’s consideration of the same topic. Here is a vast and fruitful country — a land of hills and valleys, a land of fountains and brooks of water — who shall spy it out and set the bounds thereof? I shall try to

exhibit a cluster from Eshcol, but the whole land I cannot show you, it behooves you to journey there for yourselves. It is a right royal subject — “The exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.” Whitefield and Wesley might preach the gospel better than I do, but they could not preach a better gospel.

I shall preach with the longing desire that others may be enticed to come and taste of the dainties of Christ's marriage-feast. To this end I shall rehearse the loving kindnesses of the Lord. Oh that the Holy Spirit may help *me*, and draw *you*. We begin with —

I. THE KINDNESS OF THE LORD TOWARD US IN CHRIST JESUS. What kindness He displayed in *choosing such sinners* as we were. These Ephesians had been most superstitious idolaters. You know how loudly they shouted, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians.” There was no preparedness in them to cast away their idols and to worship the great Invisible. There was nothing in them to draw them towards the light that shines in the Christ of God. They were far off, as Paul says, having no hope, and really and truly without God in the world, and yet these were the very men whom the exceeding riches of God's grace brought out of darkness into the marvelous light. They were “dead in trespasses and sins.” They walked according to the course of the world, according to the prince of the power of the air. They fulfilled the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were sunk in all manner of loathsome lusts and vices, and yet the grace of God came to men of Ephesus, and called out a church to show forth the praises of God.

Now, what were we, my brethren? We were not idolaters, nor sunk in all the degradation of Ephesus, but we were all sinners in some fashion or other. All the sheep went astray, though each one followed a different way, all took the

downward road, and we among them. We, to the utmost of our power, fulfilled the lusts of the flesh and of the mind. We did evil even as we could. If it had not been for the restraints of education and the checks of our surroundings, I know not into what crimes, we would have not plunged. It is a happy circumstance for some of us that God met with us very early, or else we would have been swept away by the torrents of our youthful passions into the worst possible vices.

We always had a strong will and a firm purpose, and courage equal to any daring. These qualities under the devil's influence would soon have forced for us a passage to hell. If we had been left to sow our wild oats, what a crop we would have had long before this. Thanks be to God for His preventing love! Alas, some, left to wander far, were allowed to prove in their lives, the sin which dwelt in them, and what a wonder of grace, what a miracle of love, that God should have selected them, after all, and brought them near to Himself. Dear brothers and sisters, I will not enlarge upon this, for this is a point for your private meditations. Shut yourselves up in your closets and think of what you were and what you would have been if it had not been for the kindness of God toward you in Christ Jesus. Forget not that the Lord has shown this kindness toward us in order that others like us may be induced to believe in the same kindness. Are any here the children of pious parents, and have you done violence to your consciences?

After the same fashion did many of us terribly rebel, and yet the Lord has had mercy upon us. Have some of you fallen into the lusts of the flesh, and followed after the pleasures of sin, and thus defiled yourselves greatly? Do not despair of pardon, for there are some here who tearfully remember how the God of pardons forgave them after they had fallen into the same sins. Whatever form your transgression may take, God has saved others who before fell into similar sins, in order that

in them He might make known to you His willingness to clasp you to His bosom, and to cast your sins behind His back. No doctrine, however clearly stated, will ever have such influence over men as living examples, but when we can say of this one and of the other, “These were great offenders. These were open sinners. These were grievous transgressors, but they obtained mercy,” we do in effect say to all of the same character, “Come, and you shall not be refused. Leave your sin as they have done. Loathe it as they do. Trust in Jesus as they have been taught to do, and you shall find equal mercy with them, and shall rejoice in the common salvation.” The kindness of God toward *us*—how I delight to dwell on the word “*us*,” then to take it up and acknowledge my own personal share in it—the kindness of God toward *me*. Do this, my brethren, and then go and display to others the kindness of the Lord toward your own souls.

But our attention is called not only to the persons whom God chose, but to His kindness displayed in *the gracious acts which He has done towards them*. Mark the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us. What has He done for us? He chose us before He lit the stars, those torches of the sky. He wrote our names upon the heart and hands of Christ before He laid the foundations of the hills. In the fullness of time He gave Christ for us, even that blessed Christ of whom we say, “Who loved me and gave Himself for me.” He made with us in Christ Jesus a covenant ordered in all things and sure, which shall stand fast when all created things dissolve. Having done this, He watched over us when we were bond-slaves to the tyrant Satan. Graciously He guarded us from going still further into transgression and committing the sin which is unto death. Then He called us, and when we would not come He drew us yet more forcibly by His effectual grace, till at last we yielded.

Oh, I cannot tell all that He did for us when we at last came to Jesus, but this I know, He washed us, and we were whiter than snow. He brought forth the best robe and put it on us, and made us comely in His sight. He gave us the kiss of sweet acceptance, and He put us among the children, and since then He has given us the children's portion and has dealt with us as He used to deal with those that love His name. We have been adopted into the family, and we have lived on the children's bread, we have been guided, and led, and instructed, and upheld, and sanctified, and the almighty Savior is still performing for us miracles of mercy. The old tale of the giants piling mountain upon mountain, Pelion upon Ossa, is outdone by our God. He has not only heaped up one hill of mercy, but He has laid mountain upon mountain, He has piled up Alps upon Alps to make a pathway for us, that we may ascend to the right hand of God, even the Father, and sit in the heavenly places with Christ. What has He done? I answer, what has He not done? What more could He do? Can you suggest a mercy? He has already given it. Can you desire a favor? It is yours already, and was yours from before the foundation of the world. Oh, the goodness, the manifold goodness, the overflowing, surpassing, inconceivable goodness of God in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

I am bound to dwell a moment on that last word, His kindness toward us *through Christ Jesus*. That is the channel through which all blessing has come to us. God gives common mercies to men as His creatures, but these riches of His grace, these covenant blessings, all come to us as His chosen, through the Mediator. You can see the mark of the cross on every spiritual favor which the Father has bestowed. Some drops of bloody sweat have fallen upon every treasured gem of the covenant treasure box. And does not this endear the mercy of God to you—that it does come through Jesus Christ? It seems

to me to enhance its value, and to make every covenant blessing more, and more, dear, because it is brought to us by the hand of the Well-beloved. By His atonement it is procured to us, and by His matchless intercession it is actually bestowed. Said I not right well that I have a theme which is too deep and high for me? I might detain you many a day upon this one word, “through Christ Jesus,” through the incarnate God, through His life and death and resurrection, and His intercession at the right hand of the throne of the majesty on high. All things come to us through Christ Jesus. He is the golden pipe of the conduit of eternal love, the window through which grace shines, the door by which it enters. Get these two or three words, and sit down and turn them over and over and over in your souls, and see if there is not the very music of heaven sleeping within them, which your faith may call forth, and coin into hallelujahs. “The exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus”—this is an anthem worthy of the celestial choirs, sing it, O you chosen of the Lord, while you are waiting to ascend His holy hill.

II. But now I take a step further, and get into the soul of the text. Let us consider — **“THE EXCEEDING RICHES OF HIS GRACE.”** Here our English is a poor language as compared with the Greek, and I believe that Paul groaned even when he was writing the matchless Greek of the text, because he could not make it express all his meaning. Even the Hebrew, which seems to be the most expressive of all human tongues, and might well have been spoken in Paradise, cannot contain or set forth the fullness of God’s great thoughts, but here the Greek is wonderful. What if I read the words, “the hyperbolical wealth of grace, or the super-abounding, excessive, overflowing riches of the grace of God”? If I were to heap up epithets, I could not give you, all that Paul means.

Only notice, first, that the riches of the grace of God are *above all limits*. A man is not rich when he can count his money, or miss this and that when he has spent it. We used to read in our first Latin books, “It is the mark of a poor man to number his flocks,” the rich man has so many sheep that he cannot count them. When a person becomes immensely wealthy, he is richer than he needs to be, and has not only enough, but much to spare. So is it with the grace of God, He has as much grace as you want, and He has a great deal more than that. The Lord has as much grace as a whole universe will require, but He has vastly more. He overflows. All the demands that can ever be made on the grace of God will never impoverish Him, or even diminish His store of mercy. There will remain an incalculably precious mine of mercy as full as when He first began to bless the sons of men.

In a country village if a man has a few hundred pounds he is thought to be quite rich. You get into a large town—there a man must have several thousands, but when you come to London, and frequent the Stock Exchange, you inquire of so-and-so, “Is he a rich man?” and someone will perhaps, reply “Yes, yes, he is worth a hundred thousand pounds.” Put that same question to a Rothschild with his millions, and he answers, “No, he is a little man. He is not rich. He only owns a hundred thousand pounds,” for these great bankers count their money by millions. Well, but what are these great Rothschilds with all their millions when they are reckoned up according to the wealth of heaven? They are nowhere at all. The Lord alone is rich. “If I were hungry,” He says, “I would not tell you, for the world is Mine and the fullness thereof.” He says, “The silver and the gold are Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.” God is so rich in mercy that you cannot tell how rich He is. His is overflowing riches, marvelous riches, exceeding riches. God is excessive in nothing that I know of except in His mercy. He

has boundless in all His attributes, but emphatically so in His love—for God is Love.

His grace is *above all observation*. The little grace which you have seen—you stop me and exclaim, “Sir, I have seen great grace.” So you have, for you, but the little grace you have seen, I say, bears no proportion to the glorious whole. You have not seen as much of God’s grace as a man might see of the sea if he stood upon the beach at Brighton or at Hastings. “Why,” you reply in surprise, “I can see as much of the ocean there, as any mortal man can see.” That may be, but men’s eyes have but a narrow range. I tell you, you have never beheld the sea, but only a trifling portion of it. If a man crosses from America he has gazed upon a narrow furrow along which his vessel has plowed its way, but no one has ever beheld to the full, the vast, majestic ocean in all its length, and breadth, and depth. Nobody can see it in all its far-resounding shores and hollow caves. Such is the “exceeding riches” of God’s grace, unsearchable, passing knowledge. Oh my poor tongue, and my dull language. I must leave my subject, for it overflows my soul and drowns my speech. You must think it out for yourselves. The grace of God surpasses all you know, all you see, and all you think.

So I remark next that this grace is *above all expression*, yes even, inspired expression. Paul, though full of the Holy Spirit, could not speak out all the love of God in Christ Jesus, for His love is unspeakable. “Thanks be to God for His unspeakable grace.” If we had all the tongues of men, and of angels, we could not declare all the riches of the grace of God. No, if all the orators that ever lived made this their one and only theme, and if all of these were under the influence of the divine Spirit, yet human language could not compass this divine thing—

“Words are but air, and tongues but clay,
And this compassion is divine.”

If we knew the language of angels we could not then declare the grace of God. The most experienced saints bewail the weakness of every form of speech to describe the exceeding riches of the grace of God.

We are compelled to add that it is *above all our ways of action*. The gospel has taught us to forgive, but we do not take to it naturally. If anyone treats us very ill it is with some difficulty that we forgive, but there are certain base, cruel, and ungrateful treatments which it becomes almost impossible to overlook, and if we forgive, yet we do not always forget. But such is the greatness of God's mercy that we who have wearied ourselves with iniquity, and wearied Him with our sins, yet have not outworn His compassion. It is hard for us to pardon, but it is spontaneous with God. He delights in it — "He delights in mercy." Twenty-six times in one psalm the sweet singer proclaims that, "His mercy endures forever." How he rings that bell again, and again, and again, "For His mercy endures forever." Your mercy is very short, and your temper is quick, so that you speak unadvisedly and angrily very soon, but it is not so with God. So wondrous are His ways of grace that they are past finding out. We cannot follow them, and can scarcely believe them because they are so unlike ours. His ways are above our ways, and His thoughts above our thoughts, as much as the heavens are above the earth. The gentlest, meekest, and most loving minds are left far behind in this race of love. Man is miserly in forgiveness, but the Lord is rich in mercy. Our little stream of goodness runs after much pumping and pressure, but the river of divine love flows freely on.

Yes, and the ways of grace are *above our understanding*. Some famous minds have been born into the world every now and then, men who have explored the sun, threaded the stars, and pried into the heart of the earth, and told us of its ancient history. God raises up every now and then, master minds to

perceive and reveal His wisdom in nature. But there never was and never shall be a human understanding that can fully grasp the incomprehensible riches of the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Sit down and think it over, and look intently into this mystery, and you will find it far beyond you. "It is high, I cannot attain unto it." I have set myself this day to study this matter, but I have barely touched it as with a swallow's wing. I have not dived into the fathomless depths, neither can I. Jehovah is such a marvelously forgiving God, so rich in His mercy, that our understanding cannot count the mighty sum. Yes, and if our thoughts were raised to the utmost, if we were sanctified to the highest degree, if we were so pure in heart as to see God, not even then should we be able to know all the exceeding riches of His grace to us who believe. The loftiest thought of the most saintly mind never rose to the height of this great argument. The most masterly poetic conception faints, its wing droops, and it falls to earth in the presence of this mercy which is higher than the heavens, and far above the clouds.

I wish I could say something that would make men know how vast the mercy of God is. Oh that these lips had language! Perhaps my failure may be better than fluency. If so, I would gladly be dumb to let mercy itself speak.

Furthermore, dear friends, the exceeding riches of God's grace may be guessed at by the fact that divine mercy is *above all our sins*. You cannot sin so much as God can forgive. If it comes to a pitched battle between sin and grace, you shall not be as bad as God shall be good. I will prove it to you. You can only sin as a man, but God can forgive as a God. You sin as a finite creature, but the Lord forgives as the infinite Creator. When I received that thought fairly into my soul last night, I felt like Abraham when he laughed for joy, I sin like a man, but He forgives like a God. We will never sin that grace may abound, that were infamous and detestable. But what a blessed text is

that, “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” Your sin is like a mountain, but if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed you shall say to this mountain, “Be you removed hence, and cast into the midst of the sea of God’s infinite mercy,” and it shall be done unto you. The atoning blood will wash out all transgression, and not a trace of it shall remain. Does not this fact magnify the mercy of God? Gross and intolerable as your sin may be, yet it is but as a drop in a bucket compared with the immense ocean of forgiving love.

Try again. God’s mercy is *greater than His promises*. “Oh, no,” you say, “that will not do. We have read of ‘exceeding great and precious promises.’” I tell you His mercy has a glory beyond His promises, for His mercy is the father of His promises. The Lord had mercy and grace before He had spoken a single promise, and it was because His heart was flaming with love that He made a covenant of grace, and wrote therein the words of peace. His promises are precious streams that come leaping up in the deserts of our lost and ruined state, but the depth that lies under, which Scripture calls “the depth that couches beneath,” is richer than the fountain which comes out of it. The mercy of God as the source and the wellhead is greater than the promises which flow from it, infinitely greater than our straitened interpretations of the promises, which fall far short of their real meaning, and even that meaning, did we know it, cannot set forth all “the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.”

Let us try again. God’s mercy is *greater than all that all His children have ever received as yet*. His redeemed are a multitude that no man can number, and each one draws heavily upon the divine bank, but notwithstanding all the grace He has ever given to them (and He has given to each of them a measureless portion), yet there is more grace in God than He has given forth as yet. “Oh,” you say, “how can that be?” It is so because His

mercy is not all given out in this life, much of it is laid up for enjoyment in the world to come. The grace which we have not yet tasted is the very crown of the feast. The Lord has prepared for them that love Him an inconceivable bliss. There is heaven, there is glory, there is all the bliss of the endless ages yet laid up in store. Oh the wealth of these heavenly reserves. I am sure I stated the truth when I said that what the Lord has given does not comprehend all the exceeding riches of His grace, He has infinitely more to give.

You have seen the river Thames go rolling along, the abounding and rejoicing river, and you see the cattle come on a hot day and stand knee deep in the stream, and drink, drink, drink. There is more water in the Thames than all the bullocks in all earth's pastures ever drank, or will drink. They may be driven from every prairie under heaven and stand on the river's brink and drink as though they would suck up Jordan at a draught, but they will never diminish the wealth of Father Thames. But even if they could, you and I would be still as far off from all possibility of draining the wondrous flood of mercy which comes flowing forth from beneath the throne of God. The rain of grace has filled the pools, but it will rain again none the less plentifully. God's ability to give is greater than our capacity to receive.

The fact is that this grace is *above all measure*. Yet we have four measures for it—height, depth, breadth, length—and this mercy of God is so exceedingly great that in each of these measures it baffles description. It is higher than our sin, though that is exceedingly heinous and proudly threatens the gates of heaven. It is higher than our thoughts, though our imagination sometimes takes a condor's flight. Oh, the height of divine mercy! It rises to the throne of the Eternal. As for the depths of grace—the sea has immense depths, but the mercy of God is altogether unfathomable. Great sins sink into it and are lost,

but grace is just as deep after it has swallowed up a world's sin as it was before. There are inconceivably deep places in God's mercy where the blackest sins are lost. Out of these come the choicest pearls of grace. Oh the depths! As for the breadth of mercy, David says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." What greater breadth can be conceived? As for the length of it, it is from everlasting to everlasting. Can anybody tell me the length of that? My sins began less than fifty years ago, but the Lord's mercy began—ah, when did it begin? It was always with Him, and His plans of mercy are from everlasting. There is a beginning to man's sin, but there is no beginning to pardoning love. I shall cease to sin, I hope, long before another fifty years are over, and I shall be beyond fear of further fault, but the mercy of the Lord will never end, world without end. Who then can compass a matter which in any one of its measurements far surpasses all human computation? Grace is above all calculation.

Hasten here, you great sinners. You are not great as compared with the Lord's great mercy in Christ Jesus. We cannot allow you to apply the word "great" to your sin; we need to reserve it for the mercy of God. We must monopolize the word, for all greatness dwells in the love and mercy of our God. However much you may have wandered, however black you may be, however defiled, God delights in mercy, it is the joy of His heart to pass by transgression and sin through the precious blood of Christ. Do not do my Lord so great a dishonor as to measure your sin and affirm that it outstrips His mercy. It cannot be! You know nothing about the glorious nature of my Lord. A child may fill its little cup out of the great sea, but the sea never misses it. Your sin is like that cup, and you may fill it to the brim with mercy, but the ocean of love will never miss all that you can take from it. Come, take all that you can take,

and none shall question you. Wash out your crimson stains in this pure flood, and it shall remain as pure as at the first. I would not speak lightly of your sin, it is an exceedingly great and grievous thing, but still I do say over again, that as compared with the infinite mercy of God it is but as a shadow to the sun, or a grain of sand to the full ocean at its flood.

III. These riches of grace deserve **TO BE STILL FURTHER ILLUSTRATED** and I shall illustrate them only by hints. What exceeding riches of grace it was on God's part that when we resisted Him in the days of our sin *He resolved to overcome our folly*. If you offer a man a great kindness, and he will not have it, you say, "Well, then, he must do without it. I am not going down on my knees to him to ask him to receive a favor from me." Yet the Lord pleads with sinners to accept His grace. "Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord." He begs and beseeches men that they will be saved. He entreats them, pleads with them, argues with them, that they would turn to Jesus and live. Oh, the exceeding riches of His grace. My Master, the Lord Jesus, came along to me and He said, "Soul, will you have pardon and forgiveness?" And fool that I was, I answered, "No." Then He came again and said, "Will you have Me and My salvation? I will take you to heaven with Me." And I answered, "No." Ah, but He would not take "No" for an answer. He had a sweet way of getting at my understanding and my will, and He drew me till at last I cried after Him. How I ate my black and rebellious words. "O Lord," I said, "take no notice of what Your poor, poor child has said. Throw his obstinate refusals behind Your back, and let me come to You." But, oh, the exceeding riches of His grace that He should stand waiting, waiting long, and knocking at our door though we would not let Him in.

The exceeding riches of His grace were seen in *making no conditions with us*. When the Lord Jesus Christ met with us He

did not stand out for terms. I heard someone say the other day, “I do not feel enough brokenness of heart or enough humiliation of spirit.” Who said that Christ demanded so much brokenness of heart and so much humbling of spirit before He would give His mercy? He who dared to say it knows not the freeness of the gospel, for the gospel comes to bring you the broken heart and the humbled spirit. And Christ comes to you just as you are, in all your alienation and your enmity, and brings everything in His hands that you can want. This is what we call free grace. A sharp critic said the other day, “Do not say ‘free grace,’ it is a tautology, grace must be free.” Ah, my dear sir, but we shall say “free grace,” so that there shall be no mistake about it, for some, I dare say, will not know where we are unless we are redundant in our expressions upon this point. There was nothing in us to draw Christ to us. We had nothing good, but everything evil. When He came He did not say, “Bankrupt sinner, you must pay two pence on the pound, and I will pay the other nineteen and ten pence.” He paid all our debts, asking not a farthing from us. He saw us lying by the roadside bruised and broken, and He did not say, “Come here, poor man; rise up, and I will bind your wounds.” No, but He came where we were lying unable to stir, and poured in the wine and the oil, and did it all without our help. This is the “exceeding riches of His grace,” in not standing stipulating and huckstering with us, but freely giving to us all we need, only asking that we would receive it, that we would be empty, and that He might fill us with His love.

Beloved, I think I never knew “the exceeding riches of His grace” better than when I was thinking, the other day, of *how His grace works*. Why, He does all this with a word. He speaks a black sinner white; He speaks a dead sinner into life by a word. “Live,” He says, and he that was dead lives. He that had been accounted unrighteous is, by God’s will, reckoned righteous,

and he is righteous, for him whom God reckons to be righteous by the imputation of Christ's righteousness is righteous indeed. Yes, and he shall be rewarded for that righteousness which God with a word gives to him.

If you want another proof of "the exceeding riches of His grace" think of the power of the blood. Once washed in the crimson fount, your every sin is gone, every spot is washed out. Yes, and gone never to return, for he that is once washed in the atoning blood will never be black again. The cleansing is perfected forever. The glorious High Priest made one offering for sin, only one, He did it once, and by that He annihilated all the sins of all His people at a single stroke, once and for all. Oh, "the exceeding riches of His grace," His word, His blood have worked such wondrous mysteries of grace.

And since then, dear friends, have not "the exceeding riches of God's grace" been marvelous to you? To think that He should accept us as believers though we had not more than half a grain of faith! He has even treated us as believers when sometimes we have been more doubters than trusters. As for our repentance, it seemed such a poor shallow regret, yet He has reckoned it repentance, and accepted it as such. Our love to Him! Oh, our poor love to Him has been like a spark hiding away in the ashes, yet He has called it love. He has known us better than we know ourselves, and He has known we loved Him notwithstanding the feebleness of our affection. These poor, frail graces of ours that we have been ashamed of, He has nevertheless rejoiced in them, and had a joy in them as being the gift of His Spirit, of "the exceeding riches of His grace."

Ever since our conversion the Lord has *held on to us*, and helped us to hold on to Him. We have sorely tried Him time out of mind. Sometimes we talk about our trials. There is another side to that. Think of Christ's trials; how we have grieved Him. We must have provoked His spirit ten thousand

times, yet He loves us infinitely, and does not give us up. He has espoused us to Himself, and He will never divorce us. He never sued out a divorce against a soul that was married to Him, nor ever will He. He has not grown cold in His love; notwithstanding our chilliness He loves us now with all His great and infinite heart. And by and by, He will open the golden gates, and He will say, “Come up here” —

“Then, Lord, shall I fully know,
Not till then, how much I owe.”

But if when I get to heaven I shall know what I owed Him here, I shall be in a greater difficulty than ever, for I shall not know what I then owe Him in His glory. It is an enormous debt we owe Him for the blessings of time, and perhaps in eternity we shall begin to calculate their value. But then we shall be sweetly oppressed with a new burden, in a sense of the amazing mercy which He will then be giving us at His right hand. We may give up the endless task. We cannot possibly calculate the sum. Brethren, we are all in an equal difficulty, and shall be so forever, for the Lord will go on to deluge us with mercy, grace, and favor, forever and forever, and we shall say to one another, when millions of years have gone, “Brother, is it not still astonishing? Do you seem to know much more of it than you did in the Tabernacle that morning when you heard the poor preacher try to do his best with his subject, and he was utterly lost in it?” And you will say, “I know far more, but I am as far off as ever from knowing all, for now I know more of my ignorance, I know more of the extent of what I do not know.” Brothers and sisters, if what we do know and what we do not know are added together to make up the total sum of the Lord’s grace, what must it be? —

“God only knows the love of God:
Oh that it now were shed abroad
In these poor stony hearts.”

God grant it, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

1666 FIRST RECORDED WORDS OF JESUS – LUKE 2:48-49

**A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, June 25, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington**

And when they saw Him, they were amazed: and His mother said unto Him, “Son, why have You thus dealt with us? Behold, Your father and I have sought You sorrowing.”

And He said unto them, “How is it that you sought Me? Know you not that I must be about My Father’s business?” —
Luke 2:48-49

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Luke 2:25-52]

THESE WORDS are very interesting because they are the first recorded utterances of our divine Lord. No doubt He said much that was very admirable while yet a child, but the Holy Spirit has not seen fit to record anything except these two questions, as if to teach us that childhood should be retiring and modest—a stage of preparation rather than of observation. We hear little of a holy child, for modesty is a precious part of its character. We ought therefore to give all the more earnest heed to these words, because they stand at the very forefront of our Lord’s teaching, and are in some respects the announcement of His whole life. Spoken as they were, at twelve years of age, we may regard them as the last words of His childhood and the first words of His youth. He is just passing

away from the time in which He could be called a child into that in which He becomes, in the eastern clime, where men ripen faster than here, a young man, a son of the law, fit to sit among the doctors in the temple, and to be instructed by them. The early days of youth are very perilous, for then it is that the rest of life is often shaped. Happy, indeed, is he who so early begins with God, and chooses as his business the service of the Lord. If all our youth had the same mind which was in Christ Jesus, what evidence we should have that the Spirit of God had been working upon our children, and was now about to speak through our youth.

I suppose that these words must have come into Luke's gospel through Mary herself. How otherwise could the evangelist have known that, "they understood not the saying which He spoke unto them," or that Mary "kept all these sayings in her heart"? Mary evidently narrates the words of the holy child, words which she had pondered again and again. She treasured up for us the gems which dropped from Jesus' lips. She tells us that this saying, simple though it seems to be, was not fully understood either by herself or by His reputed father, Joseph, and yet, mark you, we are told expressly that Mary "kept all these sayings in her heart." When you cannot put a truth into your understandings, yet lay it up in your affections. If there is anything in God's word which is exceedingly difficult, do not therefore reject it, but rather preserve it for future study.

In a father's talk with his child there must be a good deal that the child cannot fully comprehend. If he is a wise child he will seize upon the very thing he does not understand and treasure it for future use, expecting that light will spring out of it by and by. Be not among those who say that they will limit their faith by their understanding. It is probable that you will have a narrow faith if it is so, or else you will have a wide conceit. For a proud conceit alone can make us believe that we

are able to understand even one-tenth part of what God has revealed. No, I will go further, although we may understand enough to be saved by the truth, yet the full depth of truth are understood by no man, and if, therefore, we make it the rule to limit our faith by our understanding, we shall have an extremely limited range of faith.

No, let us treasure up these things. Let us highly prize these diamonds, which can only be cut by diamonds. Let us not put them aside because they are difficult, for it may be one index of their genuineness that they are so. We are grateful that the Spirit of God has given us this first word of our Lord Jesus, and we love it none the less because it is a deep word. We are not surprised that even as a child the Son of God should give forth mysterious sayings. Do you wonder that there should be much in Scripture which you cannot comprehend, when even the first words of Christ when He is yet a boy is not understood—no, not understood by those who had nursed Him, who had lived with Him the whole twelve years, and consequently knew His mode of speech and the peculiarities of His youthful language. If even Mary and Joseph did not understand, who am I, that I should forever be saying, “I must understand this or I will not receive it”? No, if we understand it not, yet will we keep all these sayings in our hearts, for we have this advantage, that the Holy Spirit is now given, by whose teaching we understand things which were hidden from the wisest saints of old.

Beloved friends, how great and full of meaning was this first word which seems so simple, the longer you look into it, the more you will be astonished at its fullness. Only superficiality and ignorance will think it plain, but the closest student will be the most astonished with the profundity of its meaning. Stier, to whom I am much indebted for thoughts upon this subject, calls this text “the solitary flower out of the

enclosed garden of thirty years.” What fragrance it exhales! It is a bud, but how lovely! It is not the utterance of His ripe manhood, but the question of His youth, yet this half-opened bud discovers delicious sweets and delightful colors worthy of our admiring meditation.

We might call these questions of Jesus the prophecy of His character, and the program of His life. In this our text, He set before His mother all that He came into the world to do, revealing His high and lofty nature and disclosing His glorious errand. This verse is one of those which Luther would call His little Bibles, with the whole gospel compressed into it. What if I compare it to the perfume of roses, of which a single drop might suffice to perfume nations and ages? It would not be possible to overrate these “beautiful words! Wonderful words! Wonderful words of life!” Who, then, am I that I should venture to take such a text? I do not take it with any prospect of being able to unveil all its meaning, but merely to let you see how unfathomable it is. Emmanuel, God with us, speaks divinely while yet in His youth. The words of THE WORD surpass all others. May the Spirit of God open them to us.

I shall handle the text thus; first, here is *the holy child's perception*, secondly, *the holy child's home*, thirdly, *the holy child's occupation*, and fourthly, *the holy child's lesson to any of us who may be seeking Him*.

I. Here we see **THE HOLY CHILD'S PERCEPTION**. Notice, first, that He evidently perceived most clearly *His high relationship*. Mary said, “Your father and I have sought You sorrowing.” The child Jesus had been known to call Joseph His father, no doubt, and Joseph was His father in the common belief of those around about Him. We read in reference to our Lord even at thirty years of age these words—“Being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph.” The holy child does not deny it, but He looks over the head of Joseph, and He brings before

His mother's mind another Father. "Know you not that I must be about My Father's business?" He does not explain this saying, but it is evident enough that He remembered then, the wonderful relationship which existed between His humanity and the great God, for He was not conceived after the ordinary manner, but He had come into the world in such a fashion that it was said to Mary, "That holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God." In a still higher sense and as a divine being, He claimed filial relationship with the Most High, but here, no doubt, He speaks as a man, and as a man He calls God, "My Father," after a higher fashion than we can do, because of His mysterious birth.

You notice that all through His life He never calls God, "Our Father," although He bids us do so. We are children of the same family, and when we pray we are to say, "Our Father which are in heaven," but our Lord Jesus has still a filial relationship more special than ours and therefore to God He says on His own account, "My Father." He expressly claims this personal relationship for Himself, and I am sure we do not grudge Him that relationship, for upon it our own relationship to the Father depends. Because He is the Son of the Highest, therefore we enter into the filial relationship with the Eternal One, according to our capacity. Jesus the child perceived that He was the Son of the Highest, and with all the simplicity of childhood He declared the secret to His mother, who already knew how true it was.

Brethren, this holy child's perception should be an instruction to us. Do you and I often enough and clearly enough perceive that God is our Father too? Do we not often act upon the hypothesis that we are not related to Him, or that we are orphans, and that our Father in heaven is dead? Do you not catch yourselves sometimes departing from under the influence of the spirit of adoption and getting into the spirit of

independence, and so of waywardness and sin? This will never do. Let us learn from this blessed One that as He early perceived His high and eminent relationship to the Father, so ought we to do, even though we may be nothing more than children in grace. We ought to know and to value beyond all expression our sonship with the great Father who is in heaven. In truth this truth should override every other, and we should live and move and act under the consciousness of our being the children of God. O Holy Spirit, teach us this!

This holy child next, perceived *the constraints of this relationship*. He says, “Know you not that I *must* be about My Father’s business?” Write that “MUST” in capital letters. It is the first appearing of an imperious “must” which swayed the Savior all along. We find it written of Him that, “He must go through Samaria,” and He Himself said, “I must preach the kingdom of God,” and again to Zaccheus, “I must abide in your house,” and again, “I must work the works of Him that sent Me.” “The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders.” “The Son of man must be lifted up.” “It behooved Christ to suffer.” As a son He must learn obedience by the things which He suffered. This Firstborn among many brethren must feel all the drawings of His sonship—the sacred instincts of the holy nature, therefore He must be about His Father’s business.

Now I put this to you again, for I want to be practical all along. Do you and I feel this divine “must” as we ought? Is necessity laid upon us, yes, woe laid upon us unless we serve our divine Father? Do we ever feel a hungering and a thirsting after Him, so that we must draw near to Him, and must come to His house, and approach His feet, and must speak with Him, and must hear His voice, and must behold Him face to face? We are not truly subdued to the son-spirit unless it is so. But when our sonship shall have become our master idea, then shall

this divine necessity be felt by us also, impelling us to seek our Father's face. As the sparks fly upward to the central fire, so we must draw near unto God, our Father and our all.

This holy child also perceived *the forgetfulness of Mary and Joseph, and He wondered*. He sees that His mother and Joseph do not perceive His lofty birth and the necessities arising out of it, and He wonders. "How is it," He says, in a childlike way, "How is it that you sought Me? Know you not that I must be about My Father's business?" He is astonished that they do not recognize His sonship, that they do not perceive that God is His Father. Does not Mary remember the angel's word at the Annunciation? Did she not know how He was born, and remember His mysterious relationship to God? Of course she did, but she was a woman, and as a woman she had nursed this child, and she had brought Him up, and therefore she began to forget the mystery which surrounded Him, in the sweet familiarities with which she had been indulged, and so she has to be reminded of it by her child's wonder that she should have forgotten that He was the Son of the Highest.

Have you those perceptions, dear children of God? Do you not often wonder why men do not know that you are a child of God? Have you sometimes spoken, and they have smiled at you as if you were idiotic or fanatical, and you have thought to yourself, "What? Do they not know how a child of God should speak, and how a child of God should act?" "Therefore, the world knows us not, because it knew Him not."—

*"Tis no surprising thing,
That we should be unknown;
The Jewish world knew not their King,
God's everlasting Son."*

The spiritual man is not understood, He is a wonder unto many. Marvel not, my brethren, if carnal men do not understand you. Yes, even your own brethren in Christ—those who do love your Father—have sometimes been astonished at you when you have only been acting simply out of your own renewed heart.

Many Christians get so stilted that they are not like children at home. They act more like strangers or hired servants in the Father's house, who have bread enough and to spare, but yet never can talk as the children do. Few let their hearts flow out with that holy fearlessness, that sweet familiarity which becomes a child of God. Why, if you and I went about the world under the full possession of this idea, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God," I have no doubt we would act in such a way that the mass, even of professors, would be amazed at us, and we should be still more amazed at their amazement and astonished at their astonishment. If we only acted as our innermost nature would dictate to us, what manner of persons we would be! So this holy child perceived His glorious sonship, perceived the constraints of the sonship working within Him, and perceived that His parents did not comprehend His feelings.

The child Jesus began also to perceive that *He personally had a work to do*, and so He said, "Know you not that I must be about My Father's business?" He had been twelve years silent, but now the shadow of the cross began to fall upon Him, and He felt a little of the burden of His lifework. He perceives that He has not come here merely to work in a carpenter's shop, or to be a peasant child at Nazareth. He has come here to vindicate the honor of God, to redeem His people, to save them from their sins, and to lead an army of blood-washed ones up to the throne of the great Father above, and therefore, He declares that He has a higher occupation than Mary and

Joseph can understand. Yet He must go back to the home at Nazareth, and for 18 years He must do His Father's business by, as far as we read, doing nothing in the way of public ministry. He must do His Father's business by hearing the Father, in secret, so that when He comes out He may say to His disciples, "All things which I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you." So great a lesson had He to teach that He must spend another eighteen years in learning it fully and God must open His ear, and awaken Him morning by morning to hear as an instructed one, that afterwards He may come forth the teacher of Israel, the Lord and Master of apostles and evangelists.

Beloved, I come back to the practical point again. Have you with your sonship obtained a vivid perception of your call and your work? You have not redemption set before you to accomplish, but you have to make known that redemption far and wide. As God has given to Christ power over all flesh that He may give eternal life to as many as the Father has given Him, so has Jesus given you power over such and such flesh, and there are some in this world who never will receive eternal life except through you. It is appointed that from your lips they shall hear the gospel; it is ordained in the divine decree that through your instrumentality they shall be brought into the kingdom of God. It is time that you and I, who perhaps have reached thirty, forty, fifty or sixty years, should now bestir ourselves and say, "Know you not that I must be up and doing my Father's business?" David had to wait till he heard the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, do you not hear the sound of a going *now*? Are there not signs and indications that you must work the will of Him that sent you, and must finish His work? The night comes wherein no man can work. Up, then, you children of God, and following the

holy child Jesus, begin to ask this question, “Know you not that I must be about my Father’s business?”

These were the perceptions of this holy child. Oh that they may come strong upon us in our own smaller way. May we perceive that we are born of God. May we perceive the Spirit within us whereby we cry, “Abba, Father.” May we have a wonderment that others do not understand the calls and urgencies of our condition, and may we have such a sense of our high calling as to proceed at once to fulfill it as God, the Holy Spirit, shall help us.

II. We shall now think of **THE HOLY CHILD’S HOME.** Here I am obliged to amend our version, and I am certain that the correction is itself correct. I am all the more strengthened in this opinion because the Revised Version endorses the emendation. This is how they read it, “Know you not that I must be in My Father’s house?” That may not be verbally exact, but it is the true sense. It should run thus, “Know you not that I must be in My Father’s?” There is no word for “house.” But in almost all languages “house” is understood. You know how we commonly say to one another, “I am going down to my father’s,” or “I shall spend the evening at my brother’s.” Everybody knows that we mean “house,” and that is just how the Greek here runs. “Know you not that I must be in My Father’s?” It means “house.” That must be the first and primary meaning of it. The text says nothing of business, unless we understand it to be included as a matter of course, since we may be sure that Jesus would not be idle in His Father’s, for He said, “My Father works hitherto, and I work.”

Observe that the question of Mary was, “Why have You thus dealt with us? Behold Your father and I have sought You sorrowing.” The answer is, “Know you not that I must be in My Father’s house?” That is plainly a complete answer, and therein strikes you as more natural than a reference to business.

If Jesus had only said, “Know you not that I must be about My Father’s business?” it would not have been any guide to them as to where He would be, because all His life He was about His Father’s business, but He was not always in the temple. He was about His Father’s business when He sat by the well and talked to the woman of Samaria, and about His Father’s business when He trod the waves of the Sea of Galilee. He might be anywhere and yet be about His Father’s business, but the natural answer to the question was, “How is it that you sought Me? Know you not that I must be in My Father’s house?” Let us read the passage thus, and see the child’s home.

Where should Jesus be but in *His Father’s dwelling place*? I doubt not that with desire He had desired to eat that passover when He should get to be twelve years old, and be old enough to go up to His Father’s house. He looked upon the temple as being for the time the residence of God, where He manifested Himself in an unusual degree, and so this holy child looked upon those walls and courts with delight as His Father’s house. It seemed most natural to Him that when He reached the place He should stay there. He had never really been at home before. Nazareth was the place where He was brought up, but Jerusalem’s Temple was on earth His true home.

I picture to my mind how that blessed child loved the place *where His Father was worshipped*. He would stand and gaze on the lambs and the bullocks that were slain in sacrifice, understanding much more about them, though a child, than you or I do, though we are grown up. It must have been, all wonderland to Him as a child—I speak not of Him as God—it must have been all marvelous to Him and deeply interesting. When the psalms went up, how He sang them with His sweet youthful voice! He said within Himself, “I must sing praises unto My Father.” When the solemn prayers were uttered, and He heard them, there were none as devout as He as He heard

the people worship His Father in heaven. It is touching to think of Him in His Father's palace. He was greater than the temple, and yet a youth.

It was His Father's house in a special sense because in the temple did everything speak of God's glory, and everything there was meant for God's worship. It was His Father's house, too, in the sense that *there His Father's work went on*. If it had not been for the sin which had turned aside the Rabbis and the priests from the faithful following of God, the Temple was the place out of which God's power went forth. "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God has shined." There, too, His Father's truth was proclaimed, and His ordinances were celebrated. The Temple was the center of the great Husbandman's farm. It was the homestead from which all the workers went forth to till the fields of Christ's own Father.

It was there especially to Him that *His Father's name was taught*. He speedily made His way away from the place of sacrifice to that of teaching, "sacrifice and offering You did not desire," but away He went to the doctors. This thoughtful, spiritual child wanted to know about everything sacred, and so He took His place among the learners, and the teachers were astonished when this new, "child of the law" put to them questions which showed that He must have thought vastly more than any other person in the temple. When these inquiries were answered they were but the predecessors of a whole army of other questions, for He wanted to know more. They were amazed that such inquiries should come from a youthful mind. In return they put questions to the youth, and He answered well, for He had a remarkable mind, and His mother had taught Him the precious word, so that He had the law and the prophets at His fingertips. No doubt He quoted in His answers, the sayings of Isaiah or of Jeremiah, and utterly astounded the doctors as they perceived that He saw deep into the holy words.

Now, to be practical again, dear friends, where should be our home as God's children but in our Father's house? Do you think we have enough of the child spirit about us to feel this? "Know you not that I must be in my Father's house?" That house is His church. Among the faithful He dwells. The saints of God are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. Let me be often among His people, for I must be in my Father's house. Ought not I, must I not, shall I not, if I am indeed a child of God, love to be where God is worshipped? Will not the hymns of God's house charm me? Will not the prayers of God's people delight me? Shall I not be eager to be at the prayer meetings of the saints? Shall I not rejoice to join in their praise? Will not my soul be delighted to be at the table of communion, and everywhere else where God has appointed to be worshipped by His saints? Shall I not love every place where God's work is going on? If I hear the gospel preached shall I not say, "Let me be there"? If there is tract distribution from house to house, shall I not say, "I, too, will take a district if I can"? If there is Sunday school work, shall I not cry, "Let me have a class according to my ability? Let me take a share in this holy enterprise"? "Know you not that I must be at my Father's? In my Father's work and in my Father's house engaged in all my Father's concerns?" Should not this compulsion, blessed and sweet and irresistible, continually be upon us? I must be where God is. If I am not with His people because I am detained by sickness, yet I must be in my Father's house. There are many mansions in that great house on earth as well as in heaven, and we can be with God in the streets, and in His house when working in the field. But we must be in our Father's house; we cannot bear to be away from God. Loss of communion is loss of peace, loss of delight.

Oh, crave fellowship with God, be covetous of it. Love everything that keeps you to it; hate everything that leads you

from it. Rise early to commune with God, before the smoke of earth obscures the face of heaven. Sit up late to commune with God, while dews are falling all around. If you can do nothing else, deny yourself rest, and wake in the night to commune with God your Father. Shall not a child love to speak with his Father, and hear his Father speak to him? It must be so; it will be so; it cannot help being so with you if you feel the child-spirit strong within you as our blessed Lord and Master did when but 12 years of age.

III. Consider, thirdly, **THE HOLY CHILD'S OCCUPATION.** Although I object to its being the correct reading, "Know you not that I must be about My Father's business?"—yet we know that this holy child would not be in His Father's house as an idler. He would be sure to be in the Father's house in the sense of being one of the workers in it. Our Father's house is a business house, and therefore we must be in our Father's business when we are at our Father's. That is the word. Though the translation which mentions business may be a questionable one, yet it is abundantly lawful to say that this holy child's occupation was to be about His Father's matters. What, then, did He do?

First, *He spent His time in learning and inquiring.* "How I pant to be doing good," says some young man. You are right, but you must not be impatient. Go among the teachers, and learn a bit. You cannot teach yet, for you do not know, go and learn before you think of teaching. Hot spirits think that they are not serving God when they are learning, but in this they err. Beloved, Mary at Jesus' feet was commended rather than Martha, cumbered with much service. "But," says one, "we, ought not, to be always hearing sermons." No, I do not know that any of you are. "We ought to get to work at once," cries another. Certainly you ought, after you have first learned what the work is. But if everybody that is converted begins to teach,

we shall soon have a mess of heresies and many raw and undigested dogmas taught which will rather do damage than good. Run, messenger, run! The King's business requires haste. No, rather pause a little. Have you any tidings to tell? First learn your message, and then run as fast as you please. There must be time for learning the message. If our blessed Lord waited thirty years, He is an example to eager persons who can scarcely wait thirty minutes. See how fast light things will travel! How eager are those to speak who know nothing! How swift to speak what they do not know, and to testify what they have never seen. This comes not of wisdom, but is the untimely fruit of folly.

I have heard it said that Dissenters do not go to their chapels for worship, but for hearing sermons. It is not true. But if it were, I beg to say that hearing sermons may be one of the most divine forms of worship out of heaven, for in hearing the gospel as it should be heard, every sacred passion is brought into play, and every power of our renewed manhood is made to bow before the Majesty on high. Faith by embracing the promise, love by rejoicing in it, hope by expecting its fulfillment—all worship when the theme is some gracious word of the Most High. Thought, memory, understanding, emotion, all are exercised. I do not know that I have ever worshipped God better than when I have heard a humble, simpleminded man tell out the story of the cross and of his own conversion. With the tears running down my eyes I have heard the gospel and adored the living God who has sent it among men. I have so seldom the privilege of hearing a sermon that, when I do, it occasions an intense delight which I can scarcely describe, and I then draw nearer to God than in any other exercise. I suppose it is so with you, at any rate, it would be so if the preaching were what it ought to be. True hearing begets worship. This holy child was about His Father's business when He was simply

asking questions and learning of the appointed teachers. In fact, we need to do more of this kind of business. We are meager, lean, and weak, because we are frothing at the mouth with talking too much before we have drank in the truth into our inmost souls. Remember, the good matter cannot come out of you if it has never gone into you, and if you have no time for receiving instruction, the matter which comes out of you will be of little worth.

This holy child is about His Father's business, for *He is engrossed in it*. His whole heart is in the hearing and asking questions. There is a force, to my mind, in the Greek, which is lost in the translation, which drags in the word, "*about*." There is nothing parallel to it in the Greek, which is, "Know you not that I must be in my Father's?" The way to worship God is to get heartily into it. "Blessed is the man whose strength is in You; in whose heart are Your ways." We say, sometimes, when preaching, "I felt that I got fairly *into* the subject," and you yourselves know when the preacher is really getting *into* it. Often he is paddling about on the shore of his text, and possibly he wades into it up to his ankles. But, oh, when he plunges into the "rivers to swim in," then you have grand times. When the precious truth has fairly carried him off his feet, you take a header too, and swim likewise.

Our Lord, when He went into the temple, became engrossed with its worship and teaching, and that was His answer to Mary. He did as good as say, "Know you not that I was absorbed in My Father's? I did not know you were gone, I forgot all about you. Know you not that My soul was in My Father's? I was so taken up with what I was learning from the doctors and what I was seeing in the temple that I could not but remain. Did you not know that? Did you not also become absorbed?" He seems to think they might have been as interested as He, and they would have been if they had borne

the same relation to God as He did. It is natural that we should become engrossed in our worship. I should not wonder if sometimes we were a little rude to those who sat next to us, or moved about a little more than etiquette would suggest, or vented our feelings in involuntary expressions, and became troublesome to those next us in the pews, so that they said, “What can be the matter with these people?” Friends, we have got into the holy engagement, and we cannot quite govern ourselves, and we feel as if we could say to you, “Know you not that I must be in my Father’s work, worship, and truth?” We cannot be half-hearted. We are too happy for that. We are carried clean away. Do you not know that we cannot be proper and calm, for we must be all taken up with our holy service?”

Besides, the holy child declares that He was *under a necessity* to be in it. “Know you not that I *must* be in My Father’s?” He could not help Himself. Christ could never be a half-hearted pupil or a lukewarm worshipper. It was not possible for Him to be that. He must get absorbed in it, drawn right into the blessed whirlpool, He must be lost in it, and give His whole thought and attention to it, and He tells His mother so. “Know you not that I *must* be about My Father’s business?” Other things did not interest the holy child, but this thing absorbed Him. You know the story of Alexander, that when the Persian ambassadors came to his father’s court, little Alexander asked them many questions, but they were not at all such as boys generally think of. He did not ask them to describe to him the throne of ivory, nor the hanging gardens of Babylon, nor anything as to the gorgeous apparel of the king. But he asked what weapons the Persians used in battle, in what form they marched, and how far it was to their country, for the boy Alexander felt the man Alexander within him, and he had presentiments that he was the man who would conquer Persia and show them another way of fighting that would make them

turn their backs before him. It is a singular parallel to the case of the child Jesus, who is taken up with nothing but what is His Father's, because it was for Him to do His Father's work, and to live for His Father's glory, and to execute His Father's purpose even to the last.

IV. Let us, lastly, learn **THIS HOLY CHILD'S SPECIAL LESSON TO THOSE OF US WHO ARE SEEKERS.** Do I address any children of God who have lost sight of Christ? It does happen at times that we miss the holy child, and it happens most often when we are happy in company, and so are taken off from Him. Mary and Joseph were, no doubt, delighted with the festival, and so they forgot Jesus. You and I, when in God's house, may forget the Lord of the house. Did you never lose Him at His own table? Did you never lose Him while engaged in His work? Have you never missed Him even while you were busy with holy things? When you do, perhaps you will say to Him, "Lord, I have sought You long, I have been among Your kinsfolk, I have been to dear saints of God and spoken to them, and have said, 'Have you seen Him whom my soul loves, for I have lost Him?'" His answer is, "Why have you sought Me?" He is not lost to those who long for Him. Cannot you trust Him when He is away? He is all right even when you see Him not. Though He does not always smile, He loves us to the end. If you are not walking in the light of His countenance, yet you are living in the love of His heart. Jesus sees you when you do not see Him. He has reasons for hiding Himself which are founded in wisdom.

Mark, dearly beloved ones, if you and I want to find our Lord, we know where He is. Do we not? He is at His Father's. Let us go unto His Father's, let us go to our Father and His Father, and let us speak with God and ask Him where Jesus is if we have lost His company. We may be sure that He is in His Father's work. We are sure of that. Let us go to work for Him

again. Do not let us say, “I feel so dull I cannot pray.” Now is the time in which we must pray. “But I do not feel as if I could praise Him.” Now is the time when you must praise Him, and the praise will come while you are praising. At times we have no heart for holy exercises, and the devil says, “Do not go.” My dear friend, be sure to go up to the assembly now, go to get the heart for going. Have you begun not to care about prayer meetings? Are you going to stay away till you do care about them? Then you will die in indifference. Come and have another turn at them. Those who are most at them love them best. Does Satan say, with regard to private prayer, “You have not the spirit of prayer, you must not pray”? Tell the devil you are going to pray for the spirit of prayer, and that you will plead till you get it. It is a sign of sickness when you cannot pray, and surely then you should go to the doctor. If there is ever a time when a man should pray more than usual, it is when he feels dead and cold in the holy engagement, go and seek Jesus at the Father’s, and seek Him in the Father’s work, and those of you who have lost communion with Him will find it again. When you take the Sunday school class again that you left because you said you had had enough of it, when you go again and preach at the street corner—you have not done that lately, when you begin again to be active in the Lord’s service, then you will again meet with this blessed One who is about His Father’s business, whether you are or not.

One more word, and that is to sinners who are seeking Christ. I would not say a word to discourage any who are seeking Jesus, but I should like to get them far beyond the stage of seeking. Perhaps the Holy Spirit will help them to do so if I read Christ’s words to them. “How is it that *you* sought ME?” Dear, dear! That is indeed a turning of things upside down. Our Lord Jesus has come into the world to seek and to save the lost, and is it not an odd thing when those who are lost get to seeking

Him? That is a reversal of all order. “How is it,” He says, “that *you* sought *Me*?”

Now, if I this morning am a poor, lost sinner, and can honestly say I am seeking Christ, there must be some blunder somewhere! How can this be? How shall I make heads or tails of it? Here is a sheep seeking the shepherd, a lost piece of silver seeking its owner. How can this be? It will all come right if you will just think of this, first, that Jesus Christ is not far away. He is in the Father's house. “Where is the Father's house?” Why, all around us! The great Father's house covers the whole world, and all the stars; He lives everywhere. He dwells not in temples made with hands, like this Tabernacle, or yon cathedral. The Lord God is outside in the fields, and in the streets, wherever you *seek* Him. Say not, “Who shall climb to heaven to find Him, or dive into the deeps to bring Him up?” “The word is near you.” Here is Christ in the midst of us! What are you looking for, man? Are you seeking for some spirit of the night, or specter of darkness?

An old man of my acquaintance in great distress was looking for his spectacles. Dear good man, he could not have seen if he had not had them on, and he was looking through his spectacles and by their aid to find them. So, many a soul is looking after Christ by the grace which they have received in him. Jesus is near. Believe in Him. Remember also another thing; that Christ must be about His Father's business. And what is His Father's business? Why, to save sinners. This is His great Father's delight. He is glad to bring His prodigals home.

Are you seeking Jesus as if He could not be found, as if it were hard to make Him hear and difficult to win His help? Why, He is busy in saving sinners. Jesus sits on Zion's hill. He receives poor sinners still. Be encouraged and do not go about among your kinsfolk seeking Him, nor with bitter tears and cries of despair look for Him as if He were hiding from you.

He is not far from any one of us. He stands before you, and He bids you trust Him. Look to Him and be saved. Do you look? You are saved. Go on your way rejoicing. God bless you. Amen.

**1667 “LOVE AND I” – A MYSTERY –
JOHN 17:26**

**A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, July 2, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington**

**“I have declared unto them Your name, and will declare it:
that the love wherewith You have loved Me may be in them,
and I in them. — John 17:26**

[Scripture Read before Sermon – John 17]

FOR SEVERAL SABBATH MORNINGS, my mind has been directed into subjects, which I might fitly call the deep things of God. I think I have never felt my own incompetence more fully than in trying to handle such subjects. It is a soil into which one may dig and dig as deep as you will and still never exhaust the golden nuggets which lie within it. I am, however, comforted by this fact, that these subjects are so fruitful that even we who can only scratch the surface of them shall yet get a harvest from them. I read once, of the plains of India, that they were so fertile that you had only to tickle them with a hoe and they laughed with plenty, and surely such a text as this may be described as equally fruitful, even under our feeble husbandry. Pearls lie on the surface here as well as in the depth. We have only to search its surface, and stir the soil a little, and we shall be astonished at the plenitude of spiritual wealth which lies before us. Oh, that the Spirit of God may help us to enjoy

the blessed truths which are here set forth! Here is the priceless treasure, but it lies hidden till He reveals it to us.

You see, this text is taken out of our Lord's last prayer with His disciples. He did as good as say, "I am about to leave you, I am about to die for you, and for awhile you will not see Me, but now, before we separate, let us pray." It is one of those impulses that you have felt yourselves. When you have been about to part from those you love, to leave them perhaps in danger and difficulty, you have felt you could do no less than say, "Let us draw near unto God." Your heart found no way of expressing itself at all so fitting, so congenial, so satisfactory, as to draw near unto the great Father and spread your case before Him.

Now, a prayer from such a one as Jesus, our Lord and Master, a prayer in such a company, with the 11 whom He had chosen, and who had been with Him from the beginning, a prayer under such circumstances, when He was just on the brink of the brook of Kedron, and was about to cross that gloomy stream and go up to Calvary and there lay down His life—such a prayer as this, so living, earnest, loving and divine, deserves the most studious meditations of all believers. I invite you to bring your best thoughts and skill for the navigation of this sea. It is not a creek or bay, but the main ocean itself. We cannot hope to fathom its depths. This is true of any sentence of this matchless prayer, but for me the work of exposition becomes unusually heavy, because my text is the close and climax of this marvelous supplication, it is the central mystery of all. In the lowest depth there is still a lower depth, and this verse is one of those deeps which still exceed the rest. Oh, how much we need the Spirit of God. Pray for His bedewing. Pray that His balmy influences may descend upon us richly now.

You will observe that the last word of our Lord's prayer is concerning *love*. This is the last petition which He offers, "That

the love wherewith You have loved Me may be in them, and I in them.” He reaches no greater height than this, namely, that His people be filled with the Father’s love. How could He rise higher? For this is to be filled with all the fullness of God, since God is love and he that loves dwells in God and God in him. What importance ought you and I to attach to the grace of love! How highly we should esteem that which Jesus makes the crown jewel of all. If we have faith, let us not be satisfied unless our faith works by love and purifies the soul. Let us not be content indeed until the love of Christ is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us. Well did the poet say—

“Only love to us be given,
Lord, we ask no other heaven.”

For indeed there is no other heaven below, and scarcely is there any other heaven above than to reach to the fullness of perfect love. This is where the prayer of the Son of David ends, in praying, “That the love wherewith You have loved Me may be in them.” What a subject! The highest that even our Lord Jesus reached in His noblest prayer. Again with groans my heart cries, Holy Spirit, help.

I shall this morning try to speak first upon *the food of love*, or what love lives upon. Secondly, *upon the love itself*, what kind of love it is. And then, thirdly, upon *the companion of love*. “That the love wherewith You have loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

I. First, THE FOOD OF LOVE to God, what is it? It is *knowledge*. “I have made known unto them Your name, and will make it known.” We cannot love a God whom we do not know. A measure of knowledge is necessary to affection. However lovely God may be, a man blind of soul cannot perceive Him,

and therefore is not touched by His loveliness. Only when the eyes are opened to behold the loveliness of God will the heart go out towards God who is so desirable an object for the affections.

Brethren, we must know in order to believe, we must know in order to hope, and we must especially know in order to love. Hence the great desirableness that you should know the Lord and His great love which passes knowledge. You cannot reciprocate love which you have never known, even as a man cannot derive strength from food which he has not eaten. Till first of all the love of God has come into your heart, and you have been made a partaker of it, you cannot rejoice in it or return it. Therefore our Lord took care to feed His disciples' hearts upon the Father's name. He labored to make the Father known to them. This is one of His great efforts with them, and He is grieved when He sees their ignorance, and has to say to one of them, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet have you not known Me, Philip? He that has seen Me has seen the Father; and why do you say, then, Show us the Father?" Study much, then, the word of God; be diligent in turning the pages of Scripture and in hearing God's true ministers, that the flame of love within your hearts may be revived by the fuel of holy knowledge which you place upon it. Pile on the logs of sandal wood, and let the perfumed fires burn before the Lord. Heap on the handfuls of frankincense, and sweet odors of sacred knowledge, that on the altar of your heart there may always be burning the sacred flame of love to God in Christ Jesus.

The knowledge here spoken of is *a knowledge which Jesus gave them*. "I have known You, and these have known that You have sent Me. And I have declared unto them Your name, and will declare it." O beloved, it is not knowledge that you and I pick up as a matter of book-learning that will ever bring out our love to the Father. It is knowledge given us by Christ through His

Spirit. It is not knowledge communicated by the preacher alone which will bless you, for however much he may be taught of God himself, he cannot preach to the heart unless the blessed Spirit of God comes and takes of the things that are spoken, and reveals them and makes them manifest to each individual heart, so that in consequence it knows the Lord. Jesus said, “O righteous Father, the world has not known You,” and you and I would have been in the same condition, strangers to God, without God and without hope in the world, if the Spirit of God had not taken of divine things and applied them to our souls so that we are made to know them.

Every living word of knowledge is the work of the living God. If you only know what you have found out for yourself, or picked up by your own industry apart from Jesus, you know nothing aright, it must be by the direct and distinct teaching of God the Holy Spirit that you must learn to profit. Jesus Christ alone can reveal the Father. He Himself said, “No man comes unto the Father but by Me.” He that knows not Christ knows not the Father, but when Jesus Christ reveals Him, ah then, we do know Him after a special, personal, peculiar, inward knowledge! This knowledge brings with it a life and a love with which the soul is not puffed up, but built up. By such knowledge we grow up into Him, who is our head, in all things being taught of the Son of God. This knowledge, dear friends, *comes to us gradually*. The text indicates this. “I have declared unto them Your name, and will declare it.” As if, though they knew the Father, there was far more to know and the Lord Jesus was resolved to teach them more.

Are you growing in knowledge, my brothers and sisters? My labor is lost if you are not growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I hope you know much more of God than you did twenty years ago when you first came to Him. That little knowledge which you

received by grace when you found “life in a look at the Crucified One” has saved you, but in these later years you have added to your faith, knowledge, and to your knowledge, experience. You have gone on to know more deeply what you knew before, and to know the details of what you seemed to know in the whole and the lump at first. You have come to look *into* things as well as *upon* things—a look at Christ saves, but oh, it is the look *into* Christ that wins the heart’s love and holds it fast and binds us to Him as with fetters of gold. We ought every day to be adding something to this inestimably precious store that as we are known of God so we may know God, and become thereby transformed from glory unto glory through His Spirit.

Are you not thankful for this blessed word of the Lord Jesus, “I will declare it,” “I will make it known”? He did so at His resurrection, when He taught His people things they knew not before. But He did so much more after He had ascended up on high when the Spirit of God was given. “He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatever I have said unto you.” And now today in the hearts of His people He is daily teaching us something that we do not know. All our experience tends that way. When the Spirit of God blesses an affliction to us, it is one of the Savior’s illuminated books out of which we learn something more of the Father’s name, and consequently come to love Him better, for that is the thing Christ aims at. He would so make known the Father, that the love wherewith the Father has loved Him may be in us, and that He Himself may be in us.

This knowledge distinguishes us from the world. It is the mark by which the elect are made manifest. In the sixth verse of this chapter our Lord says, “I have manifested Your name unto the men which You gave Me out of the world: Yours they were, and You gave them to Me; and they have kept Your Word.”

The world does not know the Father, and cannot know Him, for it abides in the darkness and death of sin. Judge yourselves therefore by this sure test, and let the love which grows out of gracious knowledge be a token for good unto you.

Now let me try to show you what the Savior meant when He said, “I have declared unto them Your name, and will declare.” This knowledge which breeds love *is knowledge of the name of God*. What does He mean by, “Your name”? Now, I do not think I would preach an unprofitable sermon if I were to stay with the context and say that the “name” here meant is especially the name used in the 25th verse, “O righteous Father, the world has not known You.” This is the name which we most need to know, “righteous Father.” Observe the singular combination here. Righteous, and yet a Father, “*Righteous;*” to us poor sinners that is a word of terror when we first hear it. “Father”—oh, how sweet. That is a word of good cheer even to us prodigals, but we are afraid to lay hold upon it, for our sins arise, and conscience protests that God must be righteous, and punish sin.

Our joy begins when we see the two united, “Righteous Father,”—a Father full of love, and nothing but love, to His people, and yet righteous as a Judge, as righteous as if He were not a Father. Dealing out His righteousness with stern severity as the Judge of all the earth must do, and yet a Father at the same time. I do declare that I never did love God at all, nor could I embrace Him in my affections, till I understood how He could be just and yet the justifier of him that believes in Jesus. How, in a word, He could be the “righteous Father.” That satisfied my conscience and my heart at the same time, for my conscience said, “It is well.” God has not put away sin without a sacrifice, and has not winked at sin nor waived His justice in order to indulge His mercy, but He remains just as He ever was—the same thrice-holy God who will by no means

spare the guilty. He has laid the punishment of our sins upon Christ. He has made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. And all this He has done that He might act to us as a Father, and save His own children from the result of their transgressions. He has given His only-begotten Son to die in our stead that many sons might be brought to glory through Him.

It is at the cross we understand this riddle. Here we see the righteous Father. But the world will not learn it, and a large part of the professing church, which is nothing better than the world wrongfully named with Christ's name, will not learn it. They do anything they can to get away from atonement; love without righteousness is their idol. Substitution is a word that is hard for the world to spell, they cannot abide it. That Christ should suffer in the place of the guilty, and bear that we might never bear the Father's righteous wrath—this they cannot receive. Many pretend to keep the atonement, and yet they tear the heart out of it. They profess to believe in the gospel, but it is a gospel without the blood of the atonement, and a bloodless gospel is a lifeless gospel, a dead gospel, and a damning gospel. Let those take heed who cannot see God as a righteous Father, for they are numbered among the world who know Him not. "These have known You," says our Lord. These who have been taught by Christ, and these alone, come to find as much joy in the word "righteous" as in the word "Father." And blending the two together they feel an intense love to the "righteous Father," and their hearts rejoice in a holy gospel, a message of mercy consistent with justice, a covenant salvation ordered in all things and sure, because it does no violence to law and does not bind the hands of justice. Beloved, if this revelation of the atoning blood does not make your heart love Jesus, and love the Father, it is because you are not in Him, but if you know this secret as to how righteousness and peace have kissed each

other, you know the name that wins the affection of believers to God. My own heart is glad and rejoices every hour because I find rest in substitution, safety in the vindication of the law, and bliss in the glory of the divine character —

“Lo! In the grace that rescued man
His brightest form of glory shines!
Here, on the cross, 'tis fairest drawn
In precious blood and crimson lines.

Here I behold His inmost heart,
Where grace and vengeance strangely join,
Piercing His Son with sharpest smart,
To make the purchased pleasure mine.

Oh, the sweet wonders of that cross,
Where God the Savior loved and died!
Her noblest life my spirit draws
From His dear wounds and bleeding side.”

Still, I would take the word “name” *in a wider sense*. “I have declared unto them Your name,” which signifies “Your character.” The word “name” is used as a sort of summary of all the attributes of God. All these attributes are well adapted to win the love of all regenerate spirits. Just think for a minute. God is *holy*. To a holy mind there is nothing in the world, there is nothing in heaven more beautiful than holiness. We read of the beauties of holiness, for to a soul that is purified, holiness is superlatively lovely. Now, beauty wins love, and consequently when Jesus Christ makes known His holy Father, and shows us in His life and in His death the holiness of the Ever-blessed, then our heart is won to the Father. “Oh,” you say, “but holiness does not always win love.” No, not the love

of the defiled hearts that cannot appreciate it, but those who are pure in heart, and can see God, no sooner behold His holiness than they are enamored of it, and their souls at once delight in their Lord.

Moreover, we learn from our Lord Jesus that God is *good*. "There is none good but one: that is God." How inexpressibly good He is! There is no goodness but what comes from God. His name, "God," is but short for "good," and all the good things that we receive in this life, and for the life to come, are but enlargements of His blessed name. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights." Blessings enjoyed by us are streams that flow from the fountainhead of God's infinite goodness to the sons of men. A man cannot help loving God when once he knows Him to be good, for all men love that which they apprehend to be good to them. A man says, "Gold is good, rest is good, fame is good," and therefore he seeks after these things, and when he comes to know that God is good, oh, then his spirit follows hard after Him. He cannot help but love that which he is persuaded is in the highest sense good. The soul that knows the name of the Lord rejoices at the very mention of Him.

To sinners like us perhaps the next word may have more sweetness. God is *merciful*; He is always ready to forgive. Note how the prophet says, "Who is a God like unto You, passing by transgression?" He does not say, "Who is a *man* like unto You?" for none among our race can for a moment be compared with Him. But even if the gods of the heathen were gods, none of them could be likened unto the Lord for mercy. Now, when a man knows that he has offended, and yet the person offended readily and freely forgives, why, it wins his love. If he is a right-hearted man he cries, "I cannot again offend one who so generously casts all my offenses behind his back." The mercy of God is such a love-winning attribute that,

as I told you the other Sunday, twenty-six times in a single psalm the ancient church sang, “His mercy endures forever.” Free grace and pardoning love, sensibly known in the soul will win your hearts unto God forever, so that you shall be His willing servants as long as you have any being.

But then there is a higher word still. God is *love*, and there is a something about love which always wins love. When Love puts on her own golden armor, and bares her sword bright with her own unselfishness, she goes on conquering and to conquer. Let a man once apprehend that God is love, that, this is God’s very essence, and he must at once love God. I do not mean merely “apprehend” that God is love in the cold intellect, but when his heart begins to glow and burn with that divine revelation then straightway the spirit is joined unto the Lord, and rests with delight in the great Father of spirits. Love knits and binds. Oh to feel more of its uniting power.

Thus I have shown you the manna which love feeds upon, the nectar which it drinks. Everything in God is lovely, and there is no trait in His character that is other than lovely. All the loveliness that can be conceived is heaped up in God without the slightest admixture of adulteration. He is love altogether, wholly, and emphatically. Oh, surely our Lord, and Master, was wise when He fed His peoples love upon such meat as this.

II. Brethren, we have as yet only been standing at the furnace mouth, let us now enter into the devouring flame while we speak, in the second place, upon **THE LOVE ITSELF**.

Observe, first, *what this love is not*. “I have declared unto them Your name, and will declare it, that the love wherewith You have loved Me may be *in* them.” Notice that the prayer is not that the Father’s love may be set *upon* them, or moved towards them. God does not love us because we know Him, for He loved us before we knew Him, even as Paul speaks of,

"His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins." Jesus has not come to set His Father's love upon the chosen. Oh, no, He did not even die with that objective, for the Father's love was upon the chosen from everlasting. "The Father Himself loves you" was always true. Christ did not die to make His Father loving, but because His Father is loving; the atoning blood is the outflow of the very heart of God toward us. So do not make a mistake. Our Lord speaks not of the divine love in itself, but in us. This is not the eternal love of God *towards* us of which we are now reading, but that love *in* us. We are inwardly to feel the love which proceeds from the Father, and so to have it *in* us. We are to have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us. It is to be recognized by us, felt in us, made the subject of inward joy; this it is that our Lord wishes to produce, that the love of God may be in us, dwelling in our hearts, a welcome guest, the sovereign of our souls.

And this love is *of a very peculiar sort*. Let me read the verse again, "That the love wherewith You have loved Me may be in them." It is God's own love in us. The love of the Father towards Jesus springs up like a crystal fountain, and then the sparkling drops fall and overflow, as you have seen the fountains do, and we are the cups into which this overflowing love of God towards Christ Jesus flows, and flows till we too are full. The inward love so much desired for us by our Lord is no emotion of nature, no attachment proceeding from the unregenerate will, but it is the Father's love transplanted into the soil of these poor hearts, and becoming our love to Jesus, as we shall have to show in the next point. But is not this a wonderful thing—that God's own love to Jesus should dwell in our hearts? And yet it is so. The love wherewith we love Christ, mark you, is God's love to Christ, "That the love wherewith You have loved Me may be in them." All true love,

such as the Father delights in and accepts at our hands, is nothing but His own love, which has come streaming down from His own heart into our renewed minds.

But what can this mean? I must ask you to observe that it includes within itself four precious things.

First, the text means that *our Lord Jesus Christ desires us to have a distinct recognition of the Father's love to Him*. He wants the love wherewith the Father loves Him to be felt in us, so that we may say, "Yes, I know the Father loved Him, for I, who am such a poor, unworthy, and foolish creature, yet love Him, and oh, how His Father must love Him." I love Him! Yes, by His grace, it were a blessed thing to die for Him, but if *I* love Him, oh, how must His Father love him who can see all His beauty, and can appreciate every distinct piece of loveliness that is in Him! God never loved anything as He loves Christ, except His people, and they have had to be lifted up to that position by the love which the Father has to His Son. For, first and foremost, the Father and the Son are one, they are one in essence. The Savior has been with the Father from the beginning, and His delight has been with Him, even as the Father testified, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Oh, try to feel, if you can, the love of the Father to His Son, or else you will not love the Father as you should for the amazing sacrifice which He made in giving Jesus to us. Think what it cost Him to tear His Well-Beloved from His bosom and send Him down below to be "despised and rejected." Think what it cost Him to nail Him up to yonder cross, and then forsake Him and hide His face from Him, because He had laid all our sins upon Him. Oh, the love He must have had to us to have made His best Beloved to become a curse for us, as it is written, "Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree."

I want you to get this right into your souls, dear friends. Do not hold it as a dry doctrine, but let it touch your heart. Let

it flow into your heart like a boiling stream, till your whole souls become like Icelandic geysers, which boil and bubble up and send their steam aloft into the clouds. Oh, to have the soul filled with the love of the Father towards Him who is altogether lovely.

Now, go a step further and deeper. Our text bears a further reading. Remember that *you are to have in your heart a sense of the Father's love to you*, and to remember that it is precisely the same love with which He loves His Son. "That the love wherewith You have loved Me may be in them." Oh, wonder of wonders, I feel more inclined to sit down and meditate upon it than to stand up and talk about it! The love wherewith He loved His Son—such is His love to all His chosen ones. Can you believe it, that you should be the object of God's delight, even as Christ is, because you are in Christ, that you should be the object of the Father's love as truly as Christ is, because He sees you to be part and parcel of the mystical body of His Well-beloved Son?

Do not tell me that God the Father does not love you as well as He does Christ, the point can be settled by the grandest matter of fact that ever was. When there was a choice between Christ and His people, which should die of the two, the Father freely delivered up His own Son that we might live through Him. Oh, what a meeting there must have been of the seas of love that day, when God's great love to us came rolling in like a glorious springtide, and His love to His Son came rolling in at the same time. If they had met and collided, we cannot imagine the result, but when they both took to rolling together in one mighty torrent, what a stream of love was there! The Lord Jesus sank that we might swim, He sank that we might rise, and now we are borne onward forever by the mighty sweep of infinite love into an everlasting blessedness which tongues and lips can never fully set forth. Oh, be ravished with

this. Be carried away with it, be in ecstasy at love so amazing, so divine, the Father loves you even as He loves His Son, after the same manner and sort He loves all His redeemed.

But now this goes to a third meaning, and that is that *we are to give back a reflection of this love, and to love Jesus as the Father loves Him*. A dear old friend speaking to me the other day in a rapturous tone said, “I love Jesus as the Father loves Him.” This is true, not equally, but like. Is not this a blessed thought? I said, “O friend that is a strong thing to say!” “Ah,” said he, “but not stronger than Jesus would have it when He prays that ‘the love wherewith You have loved Me may be in them, and I in them.’” His people love Christ as the Father loves Him—in the same way, though from lack of capacity they cannot reach to the same immeasurable force of love. Oh, to throw back on Christ His Father’s love. The Father is the sun and we are the moon, but the moonlight is the same light as the sunlight. We can see a difference because reflection robs the light of much of its heat and its brilliance, but it is the same light. The moon has not a ray of light but what came from the sun, and we have not a live coal of love to Christ but what came from the Father. We are as the moon, shining by reflected light, but Jesus loves the moonlight of our love and rejoices in it. Let us give Him all of it, let us always try to be as the full moon, and let us not dwindle down to a mere ring of love, or a crescent of affection, let us render no half moon love. Let us not be half dark and cold, but let us shine on Christ with all the light we can possibly reflect of His Father’s love, saying in our very soul —

“My Jesus, I love You, I know You are mine;
For You all the follies Of sin I resign.”

And then, fourthly, *this love of the Father in us is to go beaming forth from us to all around*. When we get the love wherewith the

Father loves the Son into our hearts, then it is to go out towards all the chosen seed. He that, loves Him that begat, loves also them that are begotten of Him. Yes and your love, is to go forth to all the sons of men, seeking their good for God's glory that they may be brought in to know the same Savior in whom we rejoice. Oh, if the love of the Father to Christ once enters into a man's soul, it will change him. It will sway him with the noblest passion, it will make him a zealot for Christ, it will cast out his selfishness, and it will change him into the image of Christ, and fit him to dwell in heaven where love is perfected.

So I conclude this second head by saying that this indwelling of the Father's love in us has the most blessed results. It has an *expulsive* result. As soon as ever it gets into the heart it says to all love of sin, "Get you away; there remains no room for you here." When the light enters in, the darkness receives immediate notice of eviction; the night is gone as soon as the dawn appears. It has also a *repulsive* power by which it repels the assaults of sin. As though a man did snatch the sun out of the heaven and made a round shield with it, and held it in the very face of the prince of darkness, and blinded him with the light, so does the love of God the Father repel the enemy. It girds the soul with the armor of light. It repels the devil, the love of the world, the love of sin, and all outward temptations.

And then what an *impulsive* power it has. Get the love of Christ into you, and it is as when an engine receives fire and steam, and so obtains the force which drives it. Then you have strengthening, then you have motive power, then are you urged on to, this and that heroic deed which, apart from this sublime love, you would never have thought of. For Christ you can live, for Christ you can suffer, for Christ you can die, when once the Father's love to Him has taken full possession of your spirit. And oh, how elevating it is. How it lifts a man up above self and sin, how it makes him seek the things that are above! How

purifying it is and how happy it makes the subject of its influence. If you are unhappy, you need more of the love of God. “Oh,” you say, “I want a larger income.” Nonsense, a man is not made happy by money. You will do very well in poverty if you have enough of the love of God. Oh, but if your soul is filled with the love of God, your spirit will be ready to dance at the very sound of His name. You murmur and moan at providence because the fire of your love is burning low. Come, get the ashes together, pray the Spirit of God to blow upon them, beg Him to bring fresh fuel of holy knowledge, till your soul becomes like Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace, heated seven times hotter. This is the kind of love we should have towards Christ. No blessing can excel it. Oh, Savior, let Your prayer be fulfilled in me and in all Your dear people this morning, and may the love wherewith the Father has loved You be in us.

III. Thirdly, here is **THE COMPANION OF LOVE**, “I in them.” Look at the text a minute and just catch those two words. Here is “love” and “I”—love and Christ come together. Oh, blessed guests! “Love and I,” says Christ, as if He felt He never had a companion that suited Him better. “Love” and “I”, Jesus is always at home where love is reigning. When love lives in His people’s hearts, Jesus, lives there too. Does Jesus, then, live in the hearts of His people? Yes, wherever there is the love of the Father shed abroad in them, He must be there. We have His word for it, and we are sure that Jesus knows where He is.

We are sure that He is where love is; for, first, where there is love there is *life*, and where there is life there is Christ, for He Himself says, “I am the life.” There is no true life in the believer’s soul that is divided from Christ. We are sure of that, so that where there is love there is life, and where there is life there is Christ. Again, where there is the love of God in the heart there is *the Holy Spirit*. But wherever the Holy Spirit is,

there is Christ, for the Holy Spirit is Christ's representative, and it is in that sense that He tells us, "Lo, I am with you always," namely, because the Spirit is come to be always with us. So where there is love there is the Spirit of God, and where there is the Spirit of God there is Christ. So it is always "Love and I."

Furthermore, where there is love there is *faith*, for faith works by love, and there never was true love to Christ apart from faith, but where there is faith there is always Christ, for if there is faith in Him, He has been received into the soul. Jesus is always near to that faith which has Himself for its foundation and resting place. Where there is love there is faith, where there is faith there is Christ, and so it is "love and I."

Yes, but where there is the Father's love toward Christ in the heart, *God* Himself is there. I am sure of that, for God is love. So if there is love within us, there must be God, and where God is, there Christ is, for He says. "I and my Father are one." So you see where there is love there must be Jesus Christ, for these reasons and for many others besides.

"I in them." Yes, if I were commanded to preach for seven years from these three words only, I would never exhaust the text, I am quite certain. I might exhaust you by my dullness, and exhaust myself by labor to tell out the sacred secret, but I should never exhaust the text. "I in them." It is the most blessed word I know of. You, beloved, need not go abroad to find the Lord Jesus Christ. Where does He live? He lives within you. "I in them." As soon as ever you pray, you are sure He hears you, because He is within you. He is not knocking at your door, He has entered into you, and there He dwells, and will go no more out forever.

What a blessed sense of power this gives to us. "I in them." Then it is no more "I" in weakness, but, since Jesus dwells in me, "I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me."

“I in them.” It is the glory of the believer that Christ dwells in him. “Unto you that believe He is precious.”

Hence we gather the security of the believer. Brothers and sisters, if Christ be in me, and I am overcome, Christ is conquered too, for He is in me. “I in them.” I cannot comprehend the doctrine of believers falling from grace. If Christ has once entered into them, will He not abide with them? Paul says, “I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord,” To that persuasion I set my hand and seal. Well, then, if Christ is in us, whatever happens to us will happen to Him. We shall be losers if we do not get to heaven, but so will He, for He is in us, and so is a partaker of our condition. If it is an indissoluble union— and so He declares it is—“I in them,” then His destiny and ours are linked together, and if He wins the victory, we conquer in Him. If He sits at the right hand of God, we shall sit at the right hand of God with Him, for He is in us.

I know not what more to say, not because I have nothing more, but because I do not know which to bring forward out of a thousand precious things. But I leave the subject with you. Go home, and live in the power of this blessed text. Go home, and be as happy as you can be to live, and if you get a little happier that will not hurt you, for then you will be in heaven. Keep up unbroken joy in the Lord. It is not “I in them” for Sundays, and gone on Mondays; “I in them” when they sit in the Tabernacle, and out of them when they reach home. No, “I in them,” and that forever and forever. Go and rejoice. Show this blind world that you have a happiness which as much outshines theirs as the sun outshines the sparks which fly from the chimney and expire. Go forth with joy and be led forth with

peace, let the mountains and the hills break forth before you
into singing —

“All that remains for me
Is but to love and sing,
And wait until the angels come,
To bear me to the King.”

“Oh, but I have my troubles.” I know you have your troubles, but they are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in you, nor even with your present glory. I feel as if I could not think about troubles, or sins, or anything else when I once behold the love of God to me. When I feel my love to Christ, which is but God’s love to Christ, burning within my soul, then I glory in tribulation, for the power of God shall be through these afflictions made manifest in me. “I in them.” God bless you with the knowledge of this mystery, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

**1668 THE STILL SMALL VOICE –
1 KINGS 19:12-13**

**A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, July 9, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington**

And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, “What do you here, Elijah?”
— 1 Kings 19:12-13

[Scripture Read before Sermon – 1 Kings 19]

ELIJAH NO DOUBT expected that after the wonderful display of God’s power on Carmel the nation would give up its idols, and would turn unto the only living and true God. Had they not confessed as with a voice of thunder, “JEHOVAH, he is the God; JEHOVAH, he is the God”? The prophet trusted that the heart of Ahab might perhaps be touched, and possibly through him the heart of Jezebel. If she did not become converted, at least the manifest interposition of JEHOVAH might check her hand from future persecution. The prophet hoped that by an influence thus established over the king and queen, the whole land would speedily glide back to its allegiance to JEHOVAH. Then would his stern heart have been glad before the Lord.

When he found out that it was not so his spirit fainted within him. The message from Jezebel that he would be slain the next morning was probably not so terrible to him as the discovery that came with it that his great demonstration against Baal was doomed to be a failure. The proud Sidonian queen would still rule over vacillating Ahab, and through Ahab she would still keep power over the people, and the idol gods would sit safely on their throne.

The thought was gall and wormwood to the idol-hating prophet. He became so despondent that he was ready to give up the conflict, and to quit the battlefield. He cannot bear to live in the land where the people were so blindly infatuated as to honor Baal, and to dishonor JEHOVAH. He resolved to leave right away. But whither shall he go? He traverses the land in hot haste, he flies into the wilderness, he will not lie down till he reaches a solitude where foot of man has not defiled the sward. But in which direction shall he hasten? He, the great law-vindicator thinks of the spot where once stood the great lawgiver, and he hastens off to Horeb, to the mount of God.

In a cave he lodges, perhaps in the very cleft of the rock where aforetime God had hidden His servant Moses, while He made all His glory to pass before him. But what a retreat before a beaten enemy! Where now is the dauntless courage which faced all Israel, one against thousands? How are the mighty fallen! Is this my lord Elijah, crouching in a cavern? Is this the man who seemed to leap into Israel's history like a lion roaring on his prey? Is this Elijah the Tishbite who brought both fire and water from the skies? Yes, it is even he. He has become faint-hearted and weary, and therefore he has fled his Master's service.

It is well for us who are always weak that we can so clearly see that the strong are only strong because God makes them so. Their occasional weakness proves that they are naturally as

weak as we are, it is only by Divine strength that they are made mighty, and this strength is ready to gird us, also, for the conflict. We take comfort from this, though we do not from it excuse our own infirmity. The Lord God of Elijah is our God, and as He sustained a man of like passions with ourselves, He can and will sustain us if we cry unto Him.

Observe very carefully and gladly how God dealt with His downcast servant. He knew that he was faithful at heart, He understood that Elijah was a true man who loved his God and feared Him, and was very jealous for His honor, therefore He did not put His servant away in anger, but He determined to revive and restore him, and bring him back to His holy warfare. Now must Elijah learn the meaning of David's song, "He restores my soul: he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

The Lord began with him in much tenderness by refreshing his physical frame. He permitted him to fall into a sleep, and when he was awakened there was a cake ready for him and a cruse of water. Then the Lord allowed him to sleep again, for this he greatly needed.

We do not lose the time we spend in sleep when we are worn out with fatigue. It is the best economy of life to let the body have a sufficiency of kind nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep. God gave His servant, after a second sleep, a second meal, and thus refreshed Elijah was able to look at things in a more cheery light.

Time was when Christian people thought very little of the corporeal system, they called their physical frame a vile body, as indeed it is in some sense, but not in every sense. If they had any doubts, and fears, and tremblings our good fathers laid them all on the back of the devil, or else ascribed them to their own unbelief, when frequently their depressions arose from want of food, or of fresh air, or from an inactive liver, or a weak

stomach. A thousand things can cast us down, and we ought not to despise the body through which they act upon us. Rather should we attend to natural laws and so look to the God of those laws to help us.

God, who made the body, and who gave it such a close affinity to the mind, observes how dependent the soul is upon the body, and often begins His restoring work by healing our diseases. We who dwell in houses of clay are often cribbed, cabined, and confined from loftier things by reason of the dust to which our soul cleaves. The Lord who heals His people began in Elijah's case, by refreshing his languid frame. He restored Elijah by sleep and by food.

If any of you here present are depressed, and in mental trouble, I would invite you to look to your health, and not to blame yourselves till first you have seen whether your sadness arises from sickness or from sin, from a feeble body or a rebellious mind. Do not think it unspiritual to remember that you have a body, for you certainly have one, and therefore ought not to ignore its existence.

If your heavenly Father thinks of your physical frame, He therein gives you a hint to do the same. If the Lord in His wisdom began with the high-spirited Elias by feeding and refreshing his mortal body, we ought to count it wisdom to look to our outward parts, it is of heretics that we read that they inculcate neglecting of the body, wise men value it as the temple of the Holy Ghost. With us it is often the case that "the spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak," it is no small thing to get the flesh put in order, the physician is often as needful as the minister.

When the man of God had been refreshed by the great Physician, he was led of the Lord to Horeb, where he would be quite alone. The Lord knew that he needed quiet as well as sleep and food, and there among the lone crags, where utter

desolation reigns undisturbed, Elijah found himself somewhat at home. When the quiet had in a measure calmed his mind, the Lord began to speak with him. He bade him go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord.

No sooner had the prophet come to the mouth of the cave than a tremendous hurricane swept down the rifts of the valleys with such force that it tore the mountains and brought down great masses of granite from their lofty summits. The great and strong wind seemed to shake the mountains to their foundations, and huge columns which long had breasted ordinary storms began to rock and reel and fall about the lone observer with thundering crashes.

The prophet was not at all alarmed. He was the child of the storm, a reprovener born to rule amid tempestuous scenes. It is very possible that his spirit felt exhilarated by the terrors around him. The tumult in which he had lived among the people was now imaged before him in the strife of the elements, I should not wonder if he even felt at home, joyously excited as the terrific blast swept over the mountains' brows.

As he stood at the mouth of the cave, the earth gave way beneath his feet, he leaned against the mountain, and lo it shook and quivered, for now the earthquake was passing by, and it seemed as if nothing was stable around him. Scarcely had this convulsion ceased than the fire displayed its brightness. The lightning flamed over the whole heaven, attended by peals of thunder such as the man of God had never heard before.

From crag to crag leaped the live lightnings, till the whole firmament blazed with the fire of God. Yet we do not find that the prophet was in the least cowed or dismayed. His was a brave spirit, calm amid the storm. As the eagle mounts in the center of the lightning, and rises on the wings of the storm, so it did seem with Elijah's spirit, he was awakened by the fury of the elements, but he was not afraid. And now the thunder

ceased, and the lightning was gone, and the earth was still, and the wind was hushed, and there was a dead calm, and out of the midst of the still air there came what the Hebrew calls “a voice of gentle silence,” as if silence had become audible.

There is nothing more terrible than an awful stillness after a dread uproar. Even the noise of the wind and of the storm which could not cow Elijah was not as terrible as the still small voice by which JEHOVAH called His servant near. Then the prophet covered his face, and went to the mouth of the cave and stood to listen, for the still small voice had won the solemn attention of his soul. It had done for him what all the rest could not do, for this reason, that the Lord was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but the Lord was in the still small voice, and Elijah knew it, and was awed, and prepared himself to hear what God the Lord would speak.

What is the lesson of this? May God the Holy Spirit help us this morning to learn it, and to teach it.

I. First, I call your attention to **THE CHOSEN AGENCY**.

Notice, at the outset, *what it was not*. It was not the terrible, it was not the tremendous, it was not the overwhelming, but something the reverse of all these. It was not a grand display of power, for God was in none of those great things which Elias saw and heard. That which conquered Elijah’s brave heart was not whirlwind, was not earthquake, was not fire, it was the still small voice.

That which effectually wins human hearts to God and to His Christ is not an extraordinary display of power. Men can be made to tremble when God sends pestilence and famine, and fire, and others of His terrible judgments, but these things end usually in the hardening of men’s hearts, and not in the winning of them. See what God did to Pharaoh and his land. Surely those plagues were thick and heavy—the like of which

had never been seen before, yet what was the result? “And Pharaoh’s heart was hardened.”

So it usually is. These things are well enough as preliminaries to the divine Gospel, which gently conquers the heart, but they do not of themselves affect the soul.

“Law and terrors do but harden
All the while they work alone;
’Tis a sense of blood-bought pardon
That dissolves a heart of stone.”

The still small voice succeeds where “terrible things in righteousness” are of no avail. I do not wonder that Elijah hoped that the terrible judgments would prevail with his countrymen, these terrible things appear to be a rough and ready way for overcoming evil, and indeed they would prevail if men’s hearts were not so “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.”

Have you not judged that if God would send a pestilence to our thoughtless city it might, perhaps, impress the thoughtless crowd, and drive to our houses of prayer those who now habitually waste the Sabbath? Might not cholera, or war, or famine alarm the consciences of the careless and drive the ungodly to their knees? Have you not thought that perhaps the screening which God has given us in saving us from the plagues of war, and from innumerable ills, may have tended to breed in men’s hearts presumption, and carelessness, and indifference? One could almost say to Christ, when we think of the sin of our fellow men, “Will You that we call fire from heaven upon them as Elias did?”

We frequently imagine that the terrors of the Lord would persuade men, and compel them to seek rest in the bosom of their God. Thanks be to infinite mercy, the Lord does not at

this present time choose the terrible way of action. He leaves the wind, He leaves the earthquake and the fire, and He speaks to men in the silence of their souls by a voice which, though it be as “silence audible,” yet it is the power of God unto salvation. But we are hard to convince that it is so. We still cling to the idea that outward pomp of power tremendous would advance the kingdom of God. We are not so ready to dispense with the twelve legions of angels as our Master was. So far as our own action is concerned, we are poor disciples of Him of whom we read, “He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets.”

In our religious exercises we are too apt to rely upon carnal force and energy. We are hopeful if we can make a noise, and create excitement, stir, and agitation. The heaving of the masses under newly invented excitements we are too apt to identify with the power of God. This age of novelties would seem to have discovered spiritual power in brass bands and tambourines, and it is hoped that souls which could not be saved by a church may be reached by an army, and minds that were insensible to Gospel arguments it is supposed can be charmed by banners. Simple apostolic teaching is at a discount, and we are treated to more sensational methods. The tendency of the time is towards bigness, parade, and show of power, as if these would surely accomplish what more regular agencies have failed to achieve. But it is not so, or else both men and God have greatly changed.

The same tendency appears in the too common saying, “At least, we must have an eloquent preacher, let us have one who can plead with choice, picked words, a master of the art of oratory, surely this we may rely upon, and fall back upon earnest pleading, and intense, arousing speech.” Yet peradventure God will not choose this form of power, for still He will not have our faith to stand in the wisdom of words, but

He will have us learn this lesson, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord.”

Crash after crash the orator's passages succeed each other. What a tremendous passage! The hearers must surely be impressed. Wind! And the Lord is not in it. And now everything seems to shake, while, like a second John the Baptist, the minister proclaims woe and terror, and pronounces the curse of God upon a generation of vipers! Will not this break hard hearts? No. Nothing is accomplished. It is an earthquake, but the Lord is not in the earthquake.

Another form of force remains. Here comes one who pleads with vehemence, all on fire, he flashes and flames! Look at the coruscations of his sensational metaphors and anecdotes. Yes, fire, might we not say fireworks? and yet the Lord does not work by such fire. The Lord is not in the fire. The furious energy of unbridled fanaticism the Lord does not use. He may employ great and terrible things as preliminaries to His soul-saving work, but they are only preliminaries, the work itself is done in the secret silence of the heart.

As they were in Elijah's case, so are these things in the cases of others, they startle and arouse, but they cannot convince and convert. That which is to quicken, enlighten, sanctify, and really bless is the still small voice of gentle silence, the words sound like a paradox, but the sense is clear to him who knows truth by experience. The voice which is not heard without is omnipotent within.

We have sufficiently shown the negative side of it, God's work stands not in the power of the creature. What, then, does God use to touch the heart? Our heavenly Father generally *uses that which is soft, tender, gentle, quiet, calm, peaceful*—a still small voice. In the work of real conversion, of bringing the soul to decision and complete obedience to God, the calling voice is often so gentle that it is quite unperceived by others except in

its results, ay, frequently so gentle that it is almost unperceived by the man who is the subject of it. He may not even be able to tell exactly when the voice came and when it went. The gentle zephyr refreshes the fevered brow, but the sufferer scarcely knows that it has passed through the sick chamber and is gone, so soft is its heaven-given breath.

In reconciliation there are no blows, nor beats of drums, nor bolts of tempests, love is the captain of this bloodless war. There is little display of physical or mental force, and yet there is more real power than if force had been used. We observe that where there was a display of power, as in wind, earthquake, and fire, we read afterwards “God was not in it,” but here, in this still small voice in which there was no display of power, God was at work. Here, then, we see the weakness of power, but we learn also the power of weakness, and how God often makes that which seems most resistible to be irresistible, and that which we would suppose to be easily waved away weaves about a man fetters from which he never can escape.

Softly and gently works the Holy Spirit, even as the breath of spring which dissolves the iceberg and melts the glacier. When frost has taken every rivulet by its throat, and held it fast, spring sets all free. No noise of hammer or of file is heard at the loosening of the fetters, but the soft south wind blows, and all is life and liberty. So is it with the work of the Spirit of God in the soul when He comes actually to set the sinner free, He works effectually, but no voice is heard.

Now, whatever the soft and gentle instrumentality may be, it is in every case, if it saves the soul, *wrought by the Holy Spirit's presence*, and the Holy Spirit, though He can be “a rushing, mighty wind” when He wills—for He comes according to His own sovereign pleasure—yet usually when He comes to bring to man the peace of God, descends as the dove, or as the dew from heaven—all peace, and gentleness, and quiet. Satan can

set the soul on fire with agony, doubts and fears and terrors rend it like an awful earthquake, and the whole man is in trouble and confusion, as the whirlwind of the law sweeps through his soul, but the Spirit comes in tenderest love, revealing Christ the gentle One, setting up the cross of the Savior before the sinner's tearful eye, and speaking peace, pardon, and salvation. Brethren, this is what we need—the work of the Spirit of God in His own manner of living love.

I have said that He works usually to the salvation of the soul by revealing the love of Christ, and it is so, not only at our first conversion, but afterwards. All along His operations are after the same quiet and effectual kind. As we grow in sanctification it is by tender revelations of the Father's love. What has such influence over any of us as the infinite, overflowing grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ? You know how Mr. Monod in His sweet hymn sets forth not only our growth in sanctification, but the gentle instrument of it.

“Yet He found me: I beheld Him,
Bleeding on the accursed tree,
Heard Him pray, ‘Forgive them, Father’:
And my wistful heart said fondly,
‘Some of self and some of Thee.’

Day by day His tender mercy,
Healing, helping, full, and free,
Sweet and strong, and oh, so patient,
Brought me lower, while I whispered,
‘Less of self and more of Thee.’”

Still you perceive it is the operation of love upon the soul which works it all.

“Higher than the highest heavens,
Deeper than the deepest sea;
Lord, Thy love at last has conquered,
Grant me now my spirit’s longing,
None of self, but all of Thee.”

Thus like the silent morning light grace works upon the man. Its processes are carried on by love, there is not a touch of terror or bondage in the great reconciling deed within. The Gospel with its glad tidings leaps out of the heart of God, and enters into the heart of men, and rest follows, and sacred gratitude. God may devour His enemies with lions, but His friends He wins with love. Those that are obdurate He will break as with a rod of iron, dashing them in pieces like potters’ vessels, but for His own, when He comes to save them, He touches them with the silver scepter of mercy. Grace works with the oiled feather. Love is the chariot of omnipotence when it comes into the world of mind.

This, my dear friends (to close this first head), coming quietly home to us, to each one of us individually, without animal excitement—this it is which unites us to Jesus by faith. Elias was calm and quiet when he heard that still small voice of God. He neither fell down in horror, nor danced for joy, yet his whole nature was touched, his inmost heart was convulsed. The silence which God had caused to be heard within him thawed his soul. This is how conversions are wrought.

When the truth comes right home to the heart, when the man perceives that the message of grace belongs to him, when he grips and grapples with that truth and that truth with him, then without help from the outside, he seeks and finds eternal life. The still small voice within the conscience is God’s chosen instrumentality effectually to convert and comfort the souls of

men, the kingdom of God comes not with observation, but in the secret chamber man is brought near to God.

II. Notice THE CHOICE EFFECTS of this chosen mode of working.

The first effect of it upon Elijah was that *the man was subdued*. I have gone over this before. He who could confront the raging wind, he who was not terrified by the lightning, nor made to tremble at the earthquake, the moment he was in that stillness, and heard that gentle voice, wrapped his face in his sheepskin robe, and went outside the cave, like a child obedient to the call of his heavenly Father. And when the Spirit of God comes in His gentle power upon any of you, then you will resist no longer, you will be subdued and conquered by His soft and tender touch.

The first thing Elias did, I said, was to wrap his face in his mantle, therein imitating the angels, who cannot stand unveiled in that awful presence. He did his best to hide his face, like one ashamed—ashamed of having doubted his God, ashamed of having played the coward, ashamed of being found away from the place of his service. When the Holy Spirit deals with men and women this is an early effect upon their minds, *shamefacedness* and humiliation cover their faces.

“Confounded, Lord, I wrap my face,
And hang my guilty head;
Ashamed of all my wicked ways,
The hateful life I’ve led.”

They cannot speak in the same bold tones as they were wont to do, boasting is excluded. For some time, at any rate, they have to learn how to behave themselves in the divine presence, for walking in the light as God is in the light is not easy for newly-converted sinners, their eyes are weak and

tender, and therefore they have to cover them from the blaze of the eternal light. Love is the triumphant power, where mere power and thunder fail it leads the heart in glad captivity. Now, as I have said, nor wind nor tempest could produce this in Elijah, but the still small voice of God did it at once.

“Lord, Thou hast won, at length I yield;
My heart, by mighty grace compelled,
Surrenders all to Thee;
Against Thy terrors long I strove,
But who can stand against Thy love?
Love conquers even me.

If Thou had bid Thy thunders roll,
And lightnings flash, to blast my soul,
I still had stubborn been;
But mercy has my heart subdued,
A bleeding Savior I have view’d,
And now I hate my sin.”

It appears in reading the chapter as if the prophet did not come out of the cave until he heard that voice. He was called upon by God to come out and stand in the open before the Most High, but as I read it he had not done this until the still small voice called him, and drew him in the way of the command, so that *obedience* is a second blessed effect. Shamefaced on account of his errors, he is now resolved to follow his Lord’s word at once, and he stands at the opening of the cave to hear what God the Lord will speak.

If the Spirit of God shall work effectually upon any of us one of the first marks of it will be that while we are humbled because of sin we shall grow earnest to work righteousness. Grace makes us tender in the matter of obedience. Those who

hear the voice of the Lord are sure to cry, “Lord, show me what you would have me to do.” When that voice wins the willing ear it creates a ready foot to go where God bids us. Our desire is to know the Lord’s will, and promptly to fulfill it, for the heavenly whisper has for its burden—“Follow me.”

And now that Elias has come out into the clear air, the next effect upon him is that *he has personal dealings with God*. The voice says to him, “What do you here, Elijah?” It is a home inquiry, made to himself alone. He knows that God is speaking with him, and therefore he feels the force of every word which searches him. Then he pours out the bitterness of his grief, and tells the Lord what ails him.

The Spirit is surely at work with you when your converse is with the Lord alone. When you want nobody to hear what you have to say, but are glad to enter into your closet and shut to the door, and pray to your Father that sees in secret, this is real work, the work of God. When you feel every line of the Word of God as you read it as if it were written for you, and you alone, when you think that nobody else in the world can enter so fully into it in your judgment as you now do, for the sentences seem shaped for you, and there are little words dropped into the threatening and the promise exactly adapted for you, then it is that the still small voice is executing its sacred office.

This is a main point this contact of the soul with God—this breaking down of the barriers of things visible, this closing in with God, the unseen. Oh, it is a sight such as angels delight to behold when a man bows before the Most High and listens to his great Father’s voice, and then tells out to Him all his heart, without attempting to hide anything from Him. This is never produced by whirlwind, fire, or earthquake, it is the effect of the voice of gentle silence, for God is in it. Vain are eloquence, argument, music, and sensationalism, the Spirit works all holy

things, and He alone, and this He works in the solemn silence of a soul subdued by love.

III. In the third place, let us say a little concerning **THE LESSON WHICH ELIJAH LEARNED** from this acted parable.

He himself had taught the people by deeds rather than words, and now he is himself similarly instructed. He was taught several things which it was essential for him to know, and among them, first, that *God does not always use the means which we suppose He will use*. We sit down and think how a nation can be blessed, and we form our own idea of the most excellent way, but our thoughts are not the Lord's thoughts, for as the heavens are high above the earth so are His thoughts above our thoughts, and His ways above our ways.

I dare say you, my sanguine brother, have a well-ordered scheme in your own mind which you would like to see worked out, by which the Gospel would be made known to heathen lands very rapidly. So many workers of one kind are to assist a certain number of a higher grade, and by a wise division of labor, and allotment of districts, the work is to be systematically done. Be not too fond of favorite methods, or you may suffer great disappointment, for God, as a rule, does not use our schemes. The great steps of the Infinite are not to be measured by our childish walk. It is not ours to propose to Him what He shall do, nor how or when He shall do it, but we must leave to His sovereign will to choose and to command, and we shall yet see how wondrous He is in His workings.

Elijah's life had been one continued storm. From the first time when he appears as the prophet of fire till he fled from Jezebel, he had always spoken out of the whirlwind, and either threatened or executed the judgments of the Lord, and it may be he relied too much upon this form of ministry. No doubt it was right in him to rebuke a sinful and obstinate people, but still God would let him know that Carmel, with its complete

victory over Baal's priests, till its rivulets ran red with their blood, was not the way by which God would vanquish His enemies. Men would not worship God aright merely because in an excited moment they had slain a band of impostors. The heart is not won to loving reverence by slaughter. It is not by blood that men are baptized into spiritual worship. This same lesson has to be learned over and over by us all, let us repeat it, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD."

It is to be lamented that the most of professors obstinately cling to the fatal error of looking for displays of power of one kind or another. I hear that a certain church is seeking for a very *clever* man, she thinks that God is in the wind. I hear the deacons say, "We must look out for the best man. No matter what we give, nor what church we rob of its minister, we must get a first-class man, and then we shall have a full house, and see many converted." Nothing of the kind, it is not God's way to work by clever men, and men who aim at grandeur of speech.

He may, if so He pleases, permit the house to be thronged with attentive hearers, but converts will be few when people are relying upon cleverness. "Oh, but we must have a first-rate organization; we must work the church up by revival services." Yes, do it, and do it again, if you choose, and the result may be good if you can do the work humbly, but if you trust one iota upon the means employed, away will depart the Spirit, and you will see nothing but your own folly. That still small voice will be hushed and silent, while the boasts of your wisdom resounds like a howling wind or a thunder unaccompanied by rain.

We must know this—that God will work by what means He pleases, and next that *all means are useless apart from Him*. All wind, all fire, all earthquake, all power and grandeur, fail unless the still small voice is there and God be in it. The church has had this dinned into her ears, and doctrinally she believes it, but alas, she practically goes forth and behaves as if the opposite

theory were true. She looks for divine results to human causes, and is, therefore, full often deceived. Too much is her dependence fixed upon an arm of flesh, and while this is so we cannot expect to see the bare arm of the Eternal displayed in the midst of our camps.

God would have Elijah know another thing, and He would have us know it, that *our weakness may be our strength*. Elijah did not know anything about those seven thousand converts of his who had been won by the silent voice of his devoted life. Because the success of Carmel melted like the morning mist, he thought that his career had been a failure all along, and that he had brought no one to reverence JEHOVAH, but he was reading with the eyes of unbelief, and his imagination was leading him rather than the facts of the case.

Here are seven thousand people scattered up and down the country to whom, God has blessed Elijah's testimony. If He had not blessed his big things as he had desired, yet his little things had prospered greatly. It was Elijah's daily conduct rather than his miracles which had impressed these seven thousand and led them to hold fast their integrity. The Lord would have us know that He works rather by our weakness than by our strength, and often makes most use of us when in our own judgment we have displayed nothing but our feebleness.

Moreover, the Lord would have us note *the strength of other people in their weakness*. That lesson we do not always catch up so soon as we do the first. We are pleased to learn that when we are weak we are strong, because being generally weak we are glad to learn that we are usually strong, but we speak not thus of others, who may in some respects be our inferiors. If we see a man a little more energetic than usual we inquire petulantly, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" If some holy woman bursts out into pleading testimony, we say, "She had better be

quiet. Nothing will come of her talking.” A work is doing over yonder, and we do not quite approve of its methods, and therefore we cry, “Foolishness!”

Ah, but brother, you have to learn the strength of other weak people as well as of yourself. You know that there are others as weak as you, you are very glad to find that out, and go and tell it, but there are also others as strong as you whom God makes strong because they are weak, dealing with them in His tender loving-kindness just as He does with you. Oh that you would learn this, and then you will see that there are not only one or two faithful workers, but thousands, who are true to their Lord and valiant for the truth upon the earth.

The Lord still has a remnant who is as faithfully serving Him as you are, they have not bowed the knee to Baal nor kissed the calves, but still stand erect in their testimony to God. Believe this and be happy, for God wants you to believe it. He is not always with our powerful preachers, our learned canons, our reverend bishops, our great generals, and all that, but He may be with that poor young brother who stands at the corner of the streets, and speaks such broken sentences, and with that dear sister who takes a dozen or two girls and teaches them the Savior's love. You wonder what these can possibly have to teach, and yet the Lord is quietly and effectually speaking by their gentle voices.

We are wonderful critics, handy and keen at pulling the Lord's servants to pieces, but the mercy is, the Lord takes a sweet vengeance on us for them by giving them all the greater blessing, that our judgment may be set on one side, and that we may understand that still He speaks by whom He wills and uses whom He chooses, and that evermore this truth is sure, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the LORD of hosts.” The still small voice of the humble, retired Christian

may have more power in it under God than all the thunder and the lightning of the greatest orator that ever pleaded for Christ.

IV. Lastly, **LET US LISTEN** this morning, let the listening be practiced at once, most reverently.

If we are too many to do it here, let us get home to our own rooms and listen there. Especially I do address myself to you who do not know the Lord, you cannot cause the still small voice to be heard, but often, by making silence and sitting still in it, you may hear that call of tender love. What does it say to you unconverted people? Does it not speak to your consciences, and say, “How is it that you have lived so long in the light and yet have never seen it? How is it you have dwelt so long in the atmosphere of love and yet have never felt it? How is it that Jesus Christ has been preached to you, and you know He is the only Savior, and yet you have rejected Him?”

Years are coming upon you, your hair is turning grey, you have always hoped and half resolved that there should be a time of change to you, and yet you are just the same. I will not speak *for* your conscience, but I do ask your conscience to inquire of you, why do you use your best friend so ill? why do you slight His bleeding love? why you postpone Him for any trifle, and are always saying, “Go Your way for this time, when I have a more convenient season I will send for You”?

When conscience has done speaking, then let Jesus speak. And what will He say? “I have loved you, and given Myself for you, wherefore do you despise Me? I have come to you and spoken in accents of love, and I have bidden you trust Me, and I have said I will not cast you out if you will come to Me, why do you not come and trust?” Let His soft voice be heard, the voice of the Babe of Bethlehem, the voice of the dying Lamb on Calvary, let Him plead with you, “Come unto me, and I will give you rest.” Do you hear His voice, let other sounds be hushed that you may hear it. Get quiet at home and bend your

ear, hearkening diligently to the voice of mercy from the bleeding Son of God.

Then let the great Father speak and say, “Come to Me, My child, you have wandered, but I am ready to receive you still. If you will come to Me in truth, confessing your transgression, I am faithful and just to forgive you your sin, and to save you from all unrighteousness. Come unto Me, and you shall live in My household, and enjoy all the privileges of My children.”

Equally hearken diligently to the teachings of the Holy Ghost. Sit down and say, “Speak, blessed Spirit, speak to me.” You cannot do better this afternoon than set aside a silent time that you may incline your ear unto the Spirit of grace. Give yourself an hour of quite alone, and sit still, and say, “Now, Lord, You blessed Spirit, speak to the breaking of my heart with shame for my transgressions, speak, then, to the healing of my heart as I believe in Jesus, speak to me while I wait for You.” Oh, how many would get a blessing if they did this!

Finally, let me with tenderest accents ask each unconverted one the question JEHOVAH asked of Elijah. “What do you here, Elijah?” What brought you here this morning? Did you come to worship God, or to gratify curiosity, or merely because it is a proper thing to go to a place of worship on a Sunday? “What do you here, Elijah?” What have you been doing all morning? When the hymn was lifted up, did you praise or did you mock? And when prayer was offered did you join in it, or have you been sitting here insulting the Most High by offering Him the outside of devotion while your heart has been far from Him? “What do you here, Elijah?”

Oh, that you would reply, “I do repent of what I have done, and of what I have not done, and I lay myself down at the Father’s feet, and beseech Him for Jesus’ sake to have pity upon me and forgive me my transgressions.” You are forgiven already if you believe in Christ Jesus. If you trust your soul with

Jesus, go your way, there is no sin in God's book against you now, He has blotted out your transgressions, and will no more remember your sins. It shall be a happy day, for the voice shall speak to you this morning, and never leave off speaking till the King shall come in His glory, and take you to His right hand. The Lord bless you, dear friends, by His own Spirit, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

**1669 TEACHING BEFITTING THE HEARERS –
MARK 4:33-34**

**A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, July 16, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington**

And with many such parables spoke he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable, spoke he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples. — Mark 4:33-34

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Mark 4]

OUR BLESSED LORD had two great objectives before Him in His ministry. The first was to preach the Word to the outlying masses, that out of them He might gather a people to Himself who should be His disciples. This part of His work He carried on with great assiduity and perseverance, traversing the Holy Land from end to end and finding here one and there another, but never ceasing to preach the Gospel to the crowds that flocked to Him.

His second objective was to train those who became His disciples, that having gathered them to Himself He might educate them in the truth. He taught them concerning the Father and His love, concerning Himself, His work, His death, and His resurrection, and concerning the divine Comforter and His indwelling, and all else that would make for their progress and profit. While our Lord was here He gathered the men

together who should carry on the work after He was gone. He did not think it enough to make converts, He wished to make disciples. He did not think it enough even to make beginners in discipleship, but He would have them advance in knowledge and in holiness, learning till they were able to teach others also.

To this day this same double work is carried on by the divine Spirit through the ministers and servants of God. We are to preach to the multitude that make up the outer ring, for our Lord has said, “Go you into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” We are bound to evangelize all, making no distinction of rank or character, to every person with whom we may come in contact we are to proclaim the kingdom of God.

That being done, however, the minister’s work is only begun, for He is now to go on to expound the mystery, to open up the higher doctrine, to lead the disciplined ones into the deep things of God, that there may be in the church, fathers, instructors, and leaders, and that the church may in all the generations yet to come, until the Lord Himself appears, carry out the glorious purposes of God for the building up of a spiritual house and the conquest of the world.

I want this morning to call your special attention to the way in which the Lord spoke to the outside gathering, and then afterwards, to the way in which He spoke to the inner circle of His own disciples. From His conduct we may learn our own. Soul-winners and soul-helpers may here see their double work set before them in pattern. We shall see how Jesus first fetched home the prodigal sons, and then made music and dancing inside the house for them, how He went after the lost sheep and brought them back upon His shoulders, and how He afterwards folded and fed the sheep which He had saved. There must be much in all this to instruct those of us who work for Jesus.

I. First, let us study our Lord's conduct towards **THE OUTSIDE GATHERINGS.**

Kindly read these verses, “And with many such parables spoke he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spoke he not unto them.” First, when our divine Lord preached to the outside multitude, *He evermore spoke “the Word” to them.* You see here what He preached, He spoke “the Word” unto them. This is a very short description, but it is intensely full of meaning, it has much more of fullness in it than I can show you just now. He always spoke “the Word”—that is to say, whatever sort of congregation gathered to Jesus He had only one grand system of truth to set before them.

He preached “the Word,” which of old was prophesied by men of God, and was written upon the roll of inspiration. The term “the Word” shuts up into a small compass the glorious revelation of God which He has shown to us by Christ Jesus. “The Word”—here is *unity*, He preached not two Gospels, but one. His Word was not yea and nay. It was *a special message*, not *a Word*, but *the Word*—the special speech of the Father.

Jesus had received one weighty, all-important message from God, and this He delivered whenever He had opportunity. It was never His objective when He was addressing the people to speak to them upon subjects of merely temporal interest, He preached the eternal Word. He did not come to instruct them in geology, or astronomy, or jurisprudence, or politics, His one business was to win their souls by proclaiming the love and mercy of the Father. He did not even come to open up a fresh system of morals, though of necessity a system of morals grew out of His central teaching.

He came to preach the Gospel, and He preached nothing else. He spoke it in various ways, yet He always spoke the one thing, “the Word.” “He spoke the word *unto them*,” to publicans and harlots, or to Pharisees and Sadducees. He declares to the

blinded Jews, “I speak that which I have seen with my Father.” “He whom God has sent speaks the words of God.” What a lesson this is to all of us who try to do good in the world by teaching. We have only to preach “the Word.”

Some fancy that they have to preach the thought, the deep thought, and the wonderful thought of modern times. I have heard that expression, “modern thought,” till I am sick of it. It is a cant phrase smelling strongly of self-conceit. There is no command given in Scripture for us to go and preach our own thoughts, but we are always commanded to preach “Christ,” and to publish His Word. “The Word” is the summary of God’s thoughts, or rather of such of God’s thoughts as He chooses to reveal to men, such as He regards it important for them to know.

The Lord has spoken already all that we have to speak, our message is prescribed, our testimony is written. As to the saving truth, we have no room for invention, we have no scope for discovery, our range is specified, our course is mapped out. We have to go and preach “the Word” which is laid down by the Holy Spirit in this Book, and has been taught to us personally by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Our Lord’s mind was thoughtful, His genius profound, and yet He kept to “the Word,” even as He said, “He that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of Him.” If He had pleased, He might have told us many things hidden from before the foundation of the world, He might have opened up deep mysteries and profound secrets which He knew as the Son of God, for He is the wisdom of God, but instead of that He concentrated His ministry upon that which God had revealed, and He preached only “the Word.”

“The Word” is an utterance from the mouth of God, and Jesus was God’s mouth to men, all His teaching was the Father’s Word in one way or other. He confessed, “The words

that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself.” He said also, “As my Father has taught me, I speak these things.” “The Word which you hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me.” Originality of doctrine finds no sanction in the Savior’s ministry, true ministers repeat what they are told, they do not fabricate for themselves, and they are not spiders to spin a web out of their own core.

Now, beloved brethren, let us remember this whenever we are trying to win a soul for Christ. Souls are won by “the Word.” It is the Word of God that is “quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword.” It is “the Word” which is “the living and incorruptible seed which lives and abides forever.” Therefore we must stick to “the Word.” “Oh,” say some, “there are many that have been sitting under the old-fashioned Gospel for years, and they are not converted.” What do you propose to do? Do you propose to preach another Gospel? Look you, sir, if they were not saved by the truth they will not be saved by a lie. It seems practically to be conceded that during revivals you may get a little beyond the Gospel, when there is an excitement upon the people you may say things which are not strictly accurate, and you may set yourself right afterwards, when the desirable effect has been produced. This will never do.

Not so the Savior, He spoke “the Word” unto them, whoever they might be, and He never altered that Word. I know of no condition of the human mind which can justify me in stirring by the breadth of a hair from what God has revealed. The Gospel is good at all times, in lukewarm times, or in fanatical times, and blessed is he that moors himself to it, or rather is held fast by it, and has no wish to go beyond it.

To deliver “the Word” is a plain, simple, and easy process, for when we have a soul to deal with, the medicine is prescribed, and we have only to hand it out. The meat, and drink, and

medicine of souls are before us. We have not to excogitate from our own brain a salvation that will fit this sinner or that, God has given us already the salvation, and the doctrine, and the truth which will suit all sinners who will accept it. Your judgment and your careful thought will be needed to select the fitting portion of the truth, your heart will be wanted to pray over that portion that God may bless it, your responsibilities are still great, but happily you are delivered from the more tremendous task of manufacturing a Gospel.

I see the modern-thought workmen with their bellows full of wind, and their fire of very small coal. They are puffing away at a great rate. And now they take to hammering! See how the sparks fly, they are fashioning they know not what, neither do their people know what next they may forge upon the anvil. As for us, we invent nothing, but testify what we have seen and tasted and handled of the good Word of God. God has promised that His Word shall not return unto Him void, and therefore we feel sure of a happy issue. We stand upon blessed ground when we determine to speak to the outside world the revealed Word and nothing else. Within the circle of “the Word” lies life, healing, peace, joy, holiness, heaven; what more do sinners need? Oh that they would “receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save their souls.”

Notice next, that our Savior having no difficulty about His matter, but always speaking “the Word,” *spoke it simply*. He never affected profundity or obscurity. Our Lord has said many things so deep that they are lower than the abyss, and He has spoken truths so high that they are higher than the highest heaven, but still He aimed at being understood.

Some divines are like the cuttlefish, which, when it descends into the sea, often opens its ink bags, darkens the water, and hides itself from all observers. It cannot see itself amid the clouds which it purposely creates. Too many

preachers are endowed with these darkening ink bags. When they have simple truth to preach they surround it with an atmosphere of blackness, darkening counsel, and involving simplicity in mystery. They are as the west wind, which brings clouds. They must be profound if they are anything.

Now, the Lord Jesus Christ had it in His power to be more profound than any man, for He knew all things, yet He never veiled the truth, but set it forth before the people with clear light and overcoming evidence. His speech was ever plain as the sun at noon. See how your children will read the parables of Jesus and remember them. What is the best book to put before a child when it is learning to read? Why, the New Testament, for if there be difficulties in the sense there are none in the words.

What a multitude of monosyllables we have in John's Gospel! The Lord Jesus did not carry a gold pencil case with Him, that whenever He met with a word of twelve syllables He might write it down and say, "That goes into next Sunday's sermon, and so the people will know what a superior person I am." No, but He looked about to find homely similes and instructive emblems, by which to make the truth plain as a pikestaff to those who wished to understand it.

Of course the brightest light is lost on blind eyes, but Jesus never withheld that light. He was all simplicity, so that the children gathered around Him, clambered to His knees, and loved to listen to the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth. The parable was the most effectual way of conveying the truth, and therefore He used it often, and though it did hide the truth from those who were hardened, yet that was their fault, and could not be laid at the door of the parable, which in itself is a right royal method of instruction—a method which throws the labor upon the teacher, and makes it easy to the learner.

Let us learn from our Lord's example, and remember that we must do the work for those whom we would bless, we must make attention an easy matter for them by clearly setting forth the truths which we teach.

Dear brethren and sisters, when you are teaching others, take care that you yourself understand that which you would communicate. Whenever a man preaches so that you cannot understand him, the secret of it is that he does not understand himself, for if he knew what he meant to say he would, probably, be able to say it, and you would know what he meant by it, but he who is not clear in teaching in all probability does not know what he means. Therein full often lies his pretended wisdom, you, perhaps, look up and wonder at this superior man, when in fact he is an inferior man swollen out with pretense. It must be so. If he were better taught, he would teach better.

When a man has studied the subject so that he gets a grip of it he is able to set it out to others, but when it passes over his head like a bird of the air, he has not seen it and cannot describe it, and neither can any others learn from his language. Our Lord and Master taught in plainest words, and if His Gospel was hid it was hidden only to the blind in heart.

Our Lord also spoke very *suitably*. He adapted His language to the ignorance or knowledge of His audiences. He knew that they would not receive abstract truth, and therefore He seldom dispensed it, He wished to instruct rather than to amaze. On the occasion which Mark here records, "Without a parable spoke he not unto them," it would have been unsuitable to have spoken in any other fashion. Do you notice Mark's expression, "With many such parables"? "Parables" and many "of them," priceless illustrations were abundant with Him. But Mark says "such" parables, that is, simple ones, full of light, for the parables in this chapter are particularly plain. The truth

seems to lie upon the surface of them, and “with many such parables spoke he the word unto them.”

He saw that just then the minds of the people were feeble by reason of ignorance, they were as sheep not having a shepherd, and needed careful tending. Though He did sometimes deliver truth without a parable, so that they cried, “Now speak you plainly, and speak no parable”—yet for the general, when dealing with the mass of those whose minds were darkened by the Rabbinical teachers of the period, and by their own indifference to truth, He did continually use the simplest parable that could be found. Let us try to do the same.

I heard a gentleman once say that he found it very difficult to bring his mind down to the capacity of children, but the fact was that he had no mind of any consequence. He thought himself great, but this was a clear sign of littleness. He had something which he mistook for a mind, but it was an error on his part to talk of bringing it down, it needed to be raised up.

Those who clearly know the truth of God will find children to be a congenial auditory. They will pick up similes as pigeons pick up seeds, and their little eyes sparkle as they catch your meaning. Therefore, “many such parables” let us speak unto them. If they do not always care for the moral, they are in this like the people to whom our Lord addressed Himself, but He put the truth in such a form that even if they did not care for it they cared for the picture in which He set it forth, and listened earnestly to His words, and so the truth was introduced to their minds.

Dear friends, notice again that our Lord spoke *considerately*. “With many such parables spoke he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it.” What wisdom there is here, “As they were able to hear it.” Some of us are not so considerate as we ought to be, and drench those to whom we would give drink. Our Lord was not too long in His discourses, He never wearied

the people by a sermon till midnight, as Paul did. It is always better to send a congregation away longing than loathing. Our Lord knew that earnest attention involves effort, and tends to exhaustion.

True hearing lays a strain upon the mind which cannot be over long endured. None of us have more than a certain quantity of attention, and when we have used up that certain quantity, it becomes tiresome for us to hear more. We are like narrow-necked vessels, and he who tries to fill such a vessel all in a moment will spill the most of the liquor. The filling must be done gently, the water must be poured in as the vessel is able to receive it. So did the Savior, with short parables and sententious utterances, pass on from truth to truth, as the people were prepared to receive His instruction. He moderated the quantity, so that they might not be oppressed with too much.

He taught “as they were able to hear it,” that is to say, He did not puzzle them with deep doctrine when He wished to save them, for it is poor work to confound a man when you want to convert him. This Master Teacher gave forth such a quantity of truth as His auditors’ hearts could take in, and the matter was so chosen as to be on the level of their comprehension.

As for His style, it was so pleasing that they who did not believe in Him nevertheless confessed that “Never man spoke like this man.” They were held as with golden chains by His enchanting manner, for He spoke with an evident love to them, and with an anxious desire that they should receive the truth and should be saved by it.

Oh dear friends, if you want to be useful be careful to speak considerately. If you go into a sick chamber and the person says, “Would you read me the twenty-third Psalm?” do not bawl it out, but read in gentle tones suitable to the poor pained ears

and weary brain. If you have to speak a word for Christ, let it drop like the gentle dew from heaven, and do not hurl it out like a hard driving hailstorm. You cannot bully a man to Christ, you will be wise never to attempt it. Load the camel as he is able to carry, and the mind as it is able to bear. Hearts are drawn, not driven. We are not to teach as *we* are able to speak, but as the people are able to hear. We must not exhaust the hearer by our attempt to exhaust the subject. Never overdo a good thing, lest it be spoiled and rendered of none effect.

To conclude this matter, our Lord's address to the outside world was such that *if they did not receive the truth the fault lay with themselves*. It is true the mass of His hearers never saw beneath the surface, for they had no heart towards the truth, and so the parable did tend to their blindness, yet this was not the natural effect of His parable, but the misuse of it by slothful and carnal minds. Their foolish hearts were darkened. Jesus made truth so clear that their blear eyes could not bear the light. The difficulty with them was that there were so few difficulties, the truth was hard because they were proud.

Had they been taught of the Father they would have come to Jesus and delighted in the condescension which made all so plain, but their pride blinded them, even as He said, "How can you believe that receive honor one of another?" They rebelled against the light, and this was their condemnation. They were indignant at being forced to see what they did not wish to see, and so they resolved to stop in the outward letter of the parable, and go no further. Let us imitate the Lord Jesus in His endeavor to win souls, by speaking in such a style that if they are lost it shall be no fault of ours.

Dear Mr. Whitefield sometimes cried out, "O, sinners, if you are lost it is not for want of being prayed for, nor for want of being wept over, nor for want of an earnest anxiety on my part to bring you to the feet of Jesus." Make a point of being

able to say the same. In your class teaching, in your private talks with individuals, so speak that you can say, “I am clear of your blood, if you do not receive ‘the Word’ it is because you willfully refuse it. I have not concealed the word of God, neither have I embellished it so as to confuse your mind.”

Oh that every worker here might say, “I have strived to commend the truth to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” Let it be so plain that he may run that reads it. It is better to speak five words which are understood than a thousand which merely dazzle the eye of the mind. Use earnest, hearty, entreating words. You cannot chill a man into grace. I do not believe that anybody ever rode to Christ on an iceberg, frost and winter play but little part in opening the flowers in the King’s garden. If icicles hang from our lips we shall not melt men’s hearts. Cold hearts must be thawed by the warm, genial influence of a sunlit soul. May heaven’s light of love rest upon us. It will if we are truly taught of the Savior.

And now, you that are outsiders see what trouble the Savior takes with you, for what He did for men of His age He does for men of every age, He longs that you should come to Him, He puts the truth so that you may see it, and He preaches it persuasively and affectionately. Alas, that man should require such trouble to be taken with them! If anyone were giving away gold and silver he would not need to go down on his knees and entreat men to accept the precious metals, but when we have to preach “the Word,” how must we entreat, implore, beseech men to come, or else they will not come at all, nor even when we have implored and besought will they lend a listening ear and a believing heart unless the arm of the Lord be revealed. You see this, you outsiders, let the reflection of this make you ashamed, and cause you to resolve that henceforth, having ears to hear, you will hear, and when Jesus pleads you will bow to

Him. May God the Holy Spirit make it so. Thus we have set forth the manner in which our Lord spoke with the outer circle.

II. Secondly, let us see how Jesus dealt with **THE INNER CIRCLE** when He addressed Himself to His own disciples — “And when they were alone, he expounded all things to His disciples.” A most precious text. I wish I had the whole time for a sermon upon it.

Notice, first, then, that the Lord Jesus Christ *opened up to them the inner meaning of the Word*. Never yet did a man desire to learn of Jesus whom Jesus refused to teach. When men did not want to learn He drew back, and did not force Himself on them. He kept the exposition of His own teaching for those who were prepared to receive it, and who really thirsted to obtain it— “When they were alone, he expounded all things to His disciples.” Come now, dear friends, do we not wish to learn? Shall the Word be to us a mere husk with its kernel gone? Are we not anxious to know the inner meaning of the doctrine? Shall we be content to observe the outside structure of the truth in the parabolic form, and not to enter into its secret chambers, and live and dwell in the truth itself?

If you desire to have all things expounded, note well that *those to whom Christ expounded all things were His own disciples*. You must become a disciple of Christ if you are to know Christ's truth. A disciple of Christ is one who accepts Christ as his teacher, and himself becomes a learner. A disciple, however, is more than that, he is one who receives Christ as his leader and Lord. “You call me Master and Lord, and you say well,” said Jesus. Christ the Rabbi, the Master, is also Christ the Lord, the teacher and leader are one. If we are to be His disciples, we must do what He bids us, as well as believe what He tells us. Except we are willing to tread in His footsteps and follow His example we cannot be His disciples, and until we are such He will not expound all things to us.

Do you want to understand the Scriptures? Do you long to understand the deep things of God, and the high mysteries of the Word? Then, first, become Christ's disciples. "If any man shall do his will, he shall know of the doctrine." The teaching of Christ is spirit and life. The rabbis taught the letter, but Christ teaches the life, and if we submit ourselves to Him to receive His life, and to make Him our way, He will then be to us the truth, but if we refuse Him, if we will not yield to Him, we shall remain in darkness with all the rest of the outer circle; hearing, we shall hear and not understand; seeing, we shall see and not perceive.

Oh, my hearer, instead of trying to untie all knots and unravel all difficulties, yield yourself to Christ first of all. If you would know, believe and obey. You must trust Christ first, and yield yourself up wholly to Him, and then shall the divine light of the Holy Spirit come streaming into your soul to open up to you the things hidden from the carnally wise. First, we must be in very deed the Lord's disciples. Some versions have here the word "own." Tischendorf reads it, "To his own disciples"—to those whom He owned and acknowledged as truly belonging to Him. Our Lord will surely teach His own. "When they were alone, he expounded all things to his own disciples."

If we claim to be His disciples *we must cultivate a desire to learn*. No man in holy lore learns more than he is willing to be taught. Certain ones who call themselves disciples of Christ have no wish to learn, but they have a great wish to teach before they have learned anything. See the many who run away half-hatched, with the shell on their heads, and yet they try to crow. They cannot teach, and they will not learn. If they would wait a little, and be instructed, their time might come, but they are so hasty to fight that they will neither put on armor nor gird on a sword. Eager to give drink to the thirsty, they cannot spare time to fill the cup. How can they sow if they have no seed in

the basket? Can a man have anything which he has not received? And if he has not learned it of the Father, how can he go with any power to tell it forth unto others? We must be anxious to learn.

Observe how our Lord Jesus prompts His disciples to learn. When He has given them a parable He says, “Have you understood all these things?” He comes near to them when the crowd has dispersed, and He says to them privately, “Have you understood all these things?” The crowd knows nothing, but they are gone. They have been pleased with My parables, but they have not entered into the soul of My teaching. Have you understood all these things?”

Now, at the end of a discourse that is full of Christ, this is exactly what Jesus says to you and to me, “Have you understood all these things?” Have you entered into the essential truth, and not been content to lie sleeping on the doorstep of the mere letter of it? The Savior wishes us to be inquisitive, searching into the meaning of “the Word.” “Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst” to know the meaning of His words, for they shall be instructed, for as I have said before, never did a heart hunger to learn and find the Lord unwilling to teach.

We are to be His disciples, and anxious to learn, it follows in consequence that we must *confess that we do not know*. Many a man might have known if he had but been aware that he did not know. A sense of ignorance is the doorstep of the palace of wisdom. These men that needed to be instructed by Christ, and to have all things to be expounded to them, were the very pick of the saints, out of them came the apostles and the seventy disciples, and these formed the first course of living stones laid upon the foundation to build up a spiritual house, and yet these admirable persons needed that they should be alone with Jesus to have all things expounded to them.

Oh brothers and sisters, let us not be so wickedly self-conceited as to fancy that we know everything. Are there not some who think that they carry the Gospel and all the doctrines of it in their pockets as if it were a five-sided lozenge? They have condensed the infinite into a pentagon. If anyone knows more than they know he is denounced as a heretic, hopelessly unsound. Let it not be so with us, for we dare not boast of such perfect knowledge. What do we know, my brethren? If what we do know and what we do not know were put together there would be such a difference in the size of the volumes that they could not be bound to match.

What we know is so little compared with what we do not know that we might safely take up the language of Isaac Newton, the greatest of human intellects probably, when he said that he had been like a child playing on the beach, who had picked up here and there a beautiful shell, while all the great deep of the ocean still remained unexplored. We are of yesterday, and know nothing. Like children, we need teaching, therefore let us be constantly coming to Christ. I do not mean you youngsters only, but the greybeards, the most experienced and most advanced among us. Let us be sitting at His feet with Mary, hearkening to that heavenly voice which alone can expound all things to us.

I beg you to observe carefully that these folk whom Christ instructed in the inner sense had *to be separated from the multitude*. “When they were alone.” When they had got together as birds of a feather should, when like sheep they were penned in the fold, then the Great Shepherd fed them, and not till then. Come you out from the world if you would learn the deep things of God. The more conformity to the world the more shall we abide in darkness.

It is wonderful what light will come to a man when he learns to walk the separated path. There is a way which is

narrow as a razor's edge, along which none can walk but those whom Christ upholds, but if they are willing to walk there in strict integrity, keeping themselves from the temptations of the world, and rising above the customs of society, then they shall know the mind of God. "When they were alone," when they formed themselves as it were into a church, and the rest of the congregation went to their own homes—when they distinctly acknowledged themselves to be Christ's own disciples, then He expounded the truth to them.

More than this, I will go beyond my text, if you and I wish to know the heart of our holy religion, we must get alone, even from the church, with Christ. This is the pith of it—*they were alone with Christ*. If they had been alone, and Jesus had not been there, they would have learned nothing, but they were alone *with Him*.

Oh brothers and sisters, let us practice more meditation. We are none of us as much alone as we ought to be in these busy days. I do not mean merely to pray and read, but to sit still and ponder and consider. More of that blessed silence, "frost of the mouth and thaw of the soul," is what we greatly need. I find it good in devotion occasionally to cease praying, and look up, gazing into the invisible. The heart kindles into admiration of the person of Christ, and the soul begins to speak to Him as to a friend, while all the inner man is still.

Know you not what it is to say, "I sleep, but my heart wakes"? Then it is that the Lord expounds unto us the Scripture. A good commentary is a great help, but communion with the Lord is better. If you want to understand a book there is nothing like asking the author, "Pray sir, what do you mean by this?" And if you will hasten away to the Author of Scripture, how often you will understand what He meant, though the words perplex you. I believe you might go the round of all the ministers and divines now alive, and say to them, "What does

this mean?” and they could tell you what the letter meant, but after having done that, or without doing it, if you would ask the Lord Jesus, He would more clearly show you the sense of it.

Scripture is often like Gideon's fleece, wet through with the heavenly dew, but you need to know how to press out the moisture and preserve it. The Lord Jesus can show you how to wring it till your bucket is filled. We get a precious text sometimes, and hammer away at it, and it does not break up at all, but when we ask the Lord Jesus about it, He puts power into our arm of thought, and the stone flies to pieces the next time we tap it, and we say, “Here is something I never thought to find, here is a mass of gold within this quartz, here is a diamond concealed within this common pebble, how came it there?” Lord, enlighten our darkness; put Your fingers on these eyes, that they may behold wondrous things out of Your law.

You know the old Arab story of the dervish who crossed his eyes with a magic ointment, and straightway, instead of the common house in which he lived, he saw a palace sparkling with diamonds, radiant with rubies, adorned with emeralds and gold. After such manner the Lord opens up to us a passage of Scripture, by anointing our eyes with eye-salve that we may see. What sights we have beheld in the Word! We have been lost in wonder, love, and praise! But the Lord does this to us when we are alone with Him. “When they were alone, He expounded all things unto His disciples.”

Now, brethren, I leave this part of the subject, and conclude when I notice that, in order to get this precious exposition from Christ, *we must regard Him as being the ultimate and final interpreter*. “He expounded all things to his disciples.” Those men had settled it in their hearts that they would believe whatever He said, His *ipse dixit* was to stand to them instead of argument, He Himself was to them the Word of God, the revelation of the Most High, the mystic glass into which they

looked and saw truth in all its glory. When they were willing to have it so, they were instructed. The key of Scripture is Christ. The only infallible interpreter of “the Word” is Jesus the Word. Him we may follow in every case with the utmost safety. There is more truth in the person of Christ than there is in all the books that have been written.

We hear and read of this and that “body of divinity,” there is only one body of divinity, and that is the body of Jesus Christ. Christ Jesus is our divinity. We hear of theology sometimes, what is it? Theology, that is the Word of God, and what is that but Christ? Get, then, to be familiar with Him as with a friend, and you shall know what He means. I have heard of a wise man of whom they said in his biography, that to be acquainted with him was a liberal education, that if you went and stayed with him you might put all your books away, for he was a walking encyclopedia.

I can hardly think that of any mere man, but I am sure it is true of Jesus. Communion with Him is illumination. He is that choicest book in the Christian's library which has more teaching in it than all besides. The hem of Christ's garment is better than all the robes of philosophy. There is more to be learned from His footprints than from the profoundest reasoning of the most learned men. I commend to you, brethren, and to myself also, that we do continually sit at Jesus' feet. Remember, it was of this that Jesus said, “Mary has chosen the good part.” She chose to be a learner, she chose to learn from the lips of Christ Himself.

May this good part, fall to our lot, for if we are such learners as this, then our *salvation is sure*. He that is taught of God is taught aright and taught savingly. By such teaching our *joy and pleasure will be greatly increased*. There is little joy in the bare externals of truth, the joy lies within. Many a man has come to the truth as poor children in the street on a Christmas night

come to a house and look through the window, and see the fire blazing merrily upon the hearth, but the snow is deep, and their little feet are pinched with cold. If they could enter that cozy parlor they would have warmth and comfort, but in the street all is miserable. O you that are outside the truth, peering through its windows, you get none of the joy of it! Pass through the door, which is Christ, by a loving faith, and then its entrance shall give you light. The joy and mirth of the truth are with the family of God, who bask in the light of His countenance.

It is for your salvation, it is for your delight, *it is for your security too*, for He that knows the truth will triumph over temptation. He who has been taught of Christ can meet the objections of the ungodly. There is more argument for the Gospel in Christ Himself than in all Apologies and Evidences that were ever written. Many defenses of the Gospel have now been prepared, and we are thankful for them, but if you get to Christ Himself you do not need such protections. It is to me a work of supererogation when I read defenses of inspiration and of the Gospel. Confirmed believers do not require them. *I know* the Gospel to be true. I am assured of it in my inmost soul.

If anybody were to write a book about the excellences of my mother, and ask me to be a subscriber, I should say, “I know more about it than you do, I do not need to read, or listen to arguments; I am quite beyond it, for I know her loving care for me.”

The love of Christ shed abroad in the heart is its own evidence! Do they tell us there is no Christ? No Christ? Then all life must be a dream, for we know Him, and have seen Him with the mind’s eye. Sometimes they say there is no heaven, as Atheist did in Bunyan’s “Pilgrim’s Progress.” “What?” says Christian to his companion, “Did not we see it from the top of Mount Clear when the shepherds lent us their optic glass?” Thus the Lord brings eternal things and especially His dear Son,

so vividly before our consciousness that we laugh to scorn the wisdom of the skeptic, which is but folly.

Let us be earnest to get heavenly instruction from Christ, for then *we shall be useful*, and that is the end we aim at. If you do not know the inner truth what good can you do? Here you live in this world among blind men, and they say, “Lead us!” but if the blind lead the blind they shall both fall into the ditch. No, no, you must get your own eyes opened, and must know Christ and be known of Him, and then you can help the poor blind sinner, and you can guide Him to Jesus. No one knows of what usefulness you will be capable of when you have been taught of the Lord. God do so unto you, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

1670 "THERE IS A LION!" – PROV. 22:13; 26:13

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, June 8, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

The slothful man says, "There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets." — Proverbs 22:13

The slothful man says, "There is a lion in the way; a lion in the streets." — Proverbs 26:13

[Scripture Read before Sermon — Matthew 21:28-32; 22:1-10]

THIS SLOTHFUL MAN seems to cherish that one dread of his about lions as if it was his favorite aversion, and he felt it to be too much trouble to invent another excuse. Perhaps he hugs it to his soul all the more because it is a home-born fear, conjured up by his own imagination, and as mothers are said to love their weakest children best, so is he fondest of this most imbecile of excuses. At any rate, it serves him for a passable excuse for laziness, and that is what he wants. If you can get the king of beasts to apologize for your idleness, there is a sort of royalty about your pretences. He hopes his sloth will appear the less disgraceful if he can paint a *lion rampant* upon its shield.

I am not about to speak of slothful men in general, albeit that when a man does not diligently attend to his business, he is committing great wrong to himself and to others. When a man is slothful as a servant he is unjust to his employers, and

when he is in business on his own account, idleness is usually a wrong to his wife and family. I know one who is the cause of poverty and need, to those whom he ought to provide for, and all because honest labor and himself have long since fallen out. He would not move an inch if he could help it, nor even open his eyes if he could manage to live and sleep all his life away. When a man is thoroughly eaten up with the dry rot of laziness, he generally finds some kind of excuse, though his crime is really inexcusable. “There is a lion in the way” and therefore the man judges it to be quite right that he should keep his bed, or that he should sit leisurely indoors and should not give himself too much trouble or run any risks, but all this is mere makeup to screen his loathsome vice.

No Christian ought to be slothful in his ordinary work. The apostle describes the good man as “not slothful in business”—of whatever kind that business may be. If you have a right to undertake it, if you have a right to continue in it, you have no right to be a sluggard in it. There should be as wide a division as between the poles between the thought of a Christian and the idea of a sluggard. “Whatever you do, do it heartily.” An idler is a disgrace to himself, and if he professes religion he is a dishonor to it. Paul would starve him, for he says, “If any would not work, neither should he eat,” and that is as near starvation as can be.

Popery may create and foster begging, but the true faith bids every man eat his own bread. I leave worldly sluggards to the moralist. Does not nature itself teach us to labor diligently? Man was not made for an idle life. Labor is evidently his proper condition. Even when man was perfect he was placed in the garden, not to admire its flowers, but to keep it and to dress it. If he needed to work when he was perfect, much more he does require the discipline of labor now that he is fallen. Lions or no lions, men must work, or find disease and death in sloth.

But we have many spiritual sluggards, and it is to them that I speak. They are not skeptics, they are not confirmed infidels, they are not opposers of the gospel, and perhaps their sluggish nature saves them from anything like energetic opposition to goodness. They claim that they are not averse to the gospel, on the contrary, they are rather friendly to it, and one of these days they intend to be obedient to its great commands, and to yield themselves as servants to Christ, but not just yet. The good time has not fully arrived. They have a very comfortable bed of sloth upon which they lie, and they do not want to rise in a hurry and exert themselves too much. They need to take this matter very leisurely and turn to Christ when it is quite convenient—when it will not require so much self-denial as at the present moment. "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep," is their continual cry. And although God's watchmen disturb them terribly, and cry aloud that they may wake them, yet they sleep so heavily that they just turn over when they are most disturbed and drop into their slumbers again. I want to cry aloud under the window of such sleepers tonight with the hope that perhaps some of them may be awakened. What do you mean O sleeper? Will you sleep your soul away? Will you lose heaven rather than bestir yourself? Will you never lift up your eyes till hell's torments are hopelessly about you and within you?

Our texts speak concerning the sluggard, and the first thing you notice about him is that *his tongue is not slothful*—"The slothful man says." The man who is lazy all over is generally very busy with his tongue. "The slothful man *says*, There is a lion outside." In both texts the slothful man is represented as having something to say, and I think that there are no people that have so much to say as those that have little to do. Where nothing is done much is talked about. Their goodness begins and ends in mere lip service. They talk about repentance, but

they do not repent. They are willing to hear about faith, and even to speak about it, but they do not believe. They extol zeal and fervor, but they like to see these active graces rather than to feel them. They will talk till midnight, but all ends in smoke. When you sit down to speak with them about the reason that they have not given their hearts to Christ, they are not at all short of reasons and apologies and excuses. Indeed, a man must be desperately hard pushed when he cannot make an excuse. If our first parents made garments of fig leaves, there is no fear that their descendants will fail to make coverings of some kind or other, and so the slothful man with his ready tongue declares that there is a lion in the way, and he shall be slain in the streets. He is not idle with his mouth. He has a short hand, but a long tongue.

His imagination also is not idle. There were no lions in the streets. One does not expect to find lions there. They may be in the desert, they may be in the jungle, they may be in the forest, but who expects to find lions in the streets of Jerusalem or the lanes of London? Laziness is a great lion-maker. He who does little dreams much. His imagination could create not only a lion but a whole menagerie of wild beasts, and if some mighty hunter could hunt down all the lions that his imagination has let loose, he would soon distribute more herds of the terrible animals, with wolves and bears and tigers to match. An idler will never be short of difficulties as long as he has no heart for work. As they say that any stick will do to beat a dog with, so any excuse will do to ruin your soul with, for this man's objection, after all, was not to lions in the way, he objected to the way itself, and he was glad to place a lion there so that he might be excused from going into the street. He did not want to get to his work, and therefore there was a lion in the way to obstruct him. The lion was his friend. He had invented him on purpose to be the ally of his idleness. Yes, men will have their

tongues busy and their imaginations busy, even though their hearts are idle and their hands are covered over with idle dirt.

This man, using both his imagination and his tongue, gives me the opportunity of saying that *he took great pains to escape from pains*. He had to use his inventive ability to get himself excused from doing his duty. It is an old proverb that lazy people generally take the most trouble, and so they do. And when men are unwilling to come to Christ it is very amazing what trouble they will take to keep away from Him. Hear how they argue. Mark their ingenuity in avoiding the narrow way. Oh, if they were to argue half as well upon the question why they should be saved as they do upon the question why they should not be saved; their logic would be put to a much more useful purpose. When we have talked with them, we have seen them invent all kinds of difficulties and doubts, disputes and dilemmas. They are always ready with hard doctrines and texts that are hard to understand. They seem as if they raked heaven and earth and hell to find reasons why they should be lost, and yet the only reason that they have for this is, they do not want to give up their sins. They do not want to give up their self-righteousness, they do not want to come to Jesus and be washed in His blood, and owe everything to the charity of God through the Redeemer. They cannot be troubled with repenting and so they leave that doleful business, as they call it. They do not like to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, and so they invent the lions. They do not care for faith, they do not delight in Christ, and so they invent difficulties, and take a world of trouble to avoid trouble, storing up for themselves hereafter a heap of misery in order to escape from the blessedness of being found in Christ both now and at the last great day.

Now, in dealing with sluggishness and its vain excuse, my divisions tonight will be such that every child can take them

home and remember them. The first head will be *a lion*. The second will be *two lions*, and the third will be *no lions at all*. Those three headings will surely abide in everybody's memory and they are fairly derived from the two texts.

I. The first is **"A LION."** "The slothful man says, "There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets." That is to say, it is time for him to get to the vineyard to work, but he does not get up, and he pretends that he is best in bed, for there is a lion outside the door. Would you have him risk his precious life, so valuable to himself, at any rate, if to nobody else? He turns over upon his bed to sleep again, for this is far more comfortable than to be meeting a lion, and fall prey to his teeth.

He means, I think, that there is a great difficulty—a terrible difficulty, quite too much of a difficulty for him to overcome. He has heard of lion-tamers and lion-killers, but he is not one. He has not the strength and the vigor to attack this dreadful enemy. He will even confess that he has not sufficient courage for such an encounter. The terrible difficulty which he foresees is more than he can face, it is a lion, and he is neither Samson, nor David, nor Daniel, and therefore he had rather leave the monster alone. Are there not many here who say much the same? "Oh," they say to the preacher, "you do not know our position, or the peculiar circumstances and special trials under which we labor! We would gladly be saved, but we cannot live as Christian men, our trade is a difficulty, our poverty is a difficulty, our lack of education is a difficulty, and the whole put together make it impossible; there is a lion in the way."

Yes, I know, that is what your relative said many years ago, and as long as there is any of your family left, there will always be lions about, and you, being a true descendant of the slothful one—to speak honestly to you—can hear the lion roar under your window just as your great grandfather's grandfather did in Solomon's time. I am persuaded that your sons and daughters,

if they have the same mind as you have—that is, a mind unwilling to come to Christ—will hear the voice of the lions too. Amazing difficulties will be in their way, as they are in yours. The ancient order of the Do-no-mores and the fruitful family of the Easys will keep their beds and their posts till the last trumpet shall sound. Though the promise is, "You shall tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shall you trample under feet," they have no heart for the conflict and therefore never win a victory.

Yes, but in this sluggard's case it was a very fierce lion. The Hebrew of the second text implies that it was a mighty lion that was in the street. His imagination pictured a very extraordinary monster, much larger than usual. And so, my dear friends, you have some difficulty much greater than anybody else ever had, at least, you talk as if this were the case. True, the martyrs swam through seas of blood to win the crown, and thousands were burnt to ashes at the stake that they might be found faithful to Christ. But it would seem from your talk that those lions were nothing compared with your lion, which is of huge dimensions and extraordinary ferocity. What can this lion be? Perhaps if I were to examine a little closely it might come out that you are a great coward, and the lion a wretched cur not worth noticing. Your lion is a mere mouse. Where is your manliness to tremble at so insignificant a trial? Perhaps you have an acquaintance that would be parted from you if you became a Christian. Is this your lion? It is a very young one. Or else you are following a bad trade, and a bad business, and you know that you would have to give them up. Is this all? Your shop would have to be shut on Sunday—is this, the secret of the matter? You know that the tricks that you now practice and that you find so profitable, you cannot practice if you become a Christian. Perhaps that is your lion. I should not wonder, though you try to make others believe that it is so terrible, that you really

cannot tell what it is, and yet you fondly dream that it quite excuses you for being what you are—an idle lie-abed, sleeping when the light of the gospel is shining full in your face, and declining to decide for God and for Christ, though you know what the Lord requires of you. I wish that Elijah were here tonight that he might cry, as he did on Carmel, “If God is God, serve Him. If Baal is God, serve him. How long will you waver between two opinions?” —

“Wake, you sleepers, wake!
What mean you?
Sin besets you round about,
Up and search the foes within you
Slay or chase the traitors out.”

Still you hesitate, because this lion is such a terrible lion that there never was the like of it. In all the woods; in all the forests, never was there such a roaring beast as this. So you say; if you are wide awake enough to say as much as that. I tell you that you are trying to make yourself believe a lie, for your difficulties are no greater than many of us have surmounted by God's grace. Your difficulties are not half as great as were those of Paul, and of those who lived in his day, who had to carry their lives in their hands and seemed every day given over to death for Jesus Christ's sake, and yet bravely followed their Lord's will, notwithstanding all.

Observe, again, that this sluggard said that there was a lion outside, and he should be slain in the streets. It is rather a novel thing for people to be killed by lions in the streets. It has not occurred within my recollection, and I do not think that it is ever likely to occur, but still this man professed that he expected to be slain in the streets. In an age of liberty like this, he is afraid to be a Christian because of persecution, for

persecution would be the death of him. Oh, dear! In a time like this, when to be honest, to be upright, is for certain, the best thing for this world as well as for the world to come, yet men still tell us that they would lose by being Christians. It would ruin their business, they could never make a living; they would be slain in the streets. If you had lived in Madagascar years ago, when to be a Christian involved your being hurled down a precipice or being speared, I could see something in the excuse. But in a land like this, the persecutions which are endured may be bitter, and the losses which are incurred may be heavy, but they are hardly worth mentioning as compared with the sufferings of the first ages. I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the sufferings of the past times, and much less with the glory that shall be revealed in us. It will not do for you to talk so. It is idle talk. You do not believe it yourself though you whine like a coward, "I shall be slain in the streets." If you were half a man you would never fear the streets, or think it at all probable that a wild beast would pounce upon you there.

And then look at the base conclusion—"There is a lion without, *I* shall be slain in the streets," as if the lion would be sure to look for him if it did not meddle with anybody else, as if he were the only man in the street, and not one among hundreds equally in danger, if such danger there really were. The lion, for certain, would kill him, he was quite sure of it, "*I* shall be slain in the streets." This is how sluggards talk, as if all the troubles and trials that ever fell upon men that are decided for Christ would fall upon them. And whereas many of God's Daniels have lived in dens of lions and have been none the worse for it, they cannot look to Daniel's God, and they do not expect Daniel's rescue. They are sure that they shall be torn to pieces, though there is but one lion and that lion in the streets, where there would be protection near and shelter at hand. If I

met a lion at all, I should best like to meet his roaring majesty in the streets, because there would probably be plenty of people at hand to help me. This consideration puts the case in a most ridiculous light. “Slain in the streets,” when there will be others there more courageous than himself who will rush to his rescue.

Now, look, you that talk about the difficulties of being Christians. Are there no other Christians besides you? Will you be the only believers? When you are converted to God, will you be all alone? Will there be none to help you? Is there no Christian brotherhood left among us? Are there no advanced saints who will help you, as a young man, to struggle against your doubts, and against the temptations that are in the way? Why, you know that you will not be alone in the streets of the Jerusalem of God. Once get into the city of God, which is His church, and you will be safe, for “no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, but the redeemed of the Lord shall walk there,” and thus you shall be in the blessed company. You shall be in the place of safety when once you get into the streets of the city of our God. Still, it is after such manner that idle people talk. They imagine perils. They are in fear where no fear is, frightened at their own shadows, troubled with imaginary ills.

The real lion after all is sluggishness itself, aversion to the things of God. Oh, how many we have in the Tabernacle whom I have looked to see coming forward to profess their faith in Christ, but they have not come, and for all that I can see, they are just where they were ten, twelve, twenty years ago. The real difficulty lies in this—that their heart is not right towards God. They have not yet humbly acknowledged their need of Jesus; it is too much trouble to confess their sins. They have not yet accepted the Lord Jesus as God presents Him, as the propitiation for sin. Oh, if they were in earnest about these things—if their hearts were really anxious to find Christ, they

would not see this lion in the way. I am quite sure that the monster would soon disappear.

Dear friend, one very common species of lion, is the plea of many, that they cannot understand the way of salvation. Is that true? Then remember the text of last Sunday morning—"If our gospel is hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world has blinded their minds." [See Sermon #1663]. . It is an awful thing, then, to say, "I cannot understand it," for it proves that you are under the power of the devil. Another man says, "I cannot believe it." That is an equally dreadful thing to say. What is it? No. *Who* is it that you cannot believe? Can you not believe God? Is He a liar? Remember how John puts it, and he is the most loving of all spirits—"He that believes not has made God a liar, because he has not believed on His Son." It is a dreadful thing to say—"I cannot believe," when God, who cannot lie, is the object of the remark. If you make such an observation to your fellow man you disgrace him. But if you say it to God, oh, how you dishonor Him! That excuse will not do. If Jesus speaks the truth, why do you not believe Him? The gospel is plain to the understanding of those who wish to know the truth, and it carries such evidence with it that it ought to be at once received without a quibble. Can you deny this? Then where is your lion?

"But," says one, "if I did come to Christ, I am persuaded that after a little while I should fall back." Be not so sure of that. If you give your heart to Christ, has He not promised to keep you? Is it not written, "I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of My hands"? Do you think that you are to keep yourself from falling? If so, read this doxology, and try to sing it—"Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of God with exceeding joy—unto Him be glory both now and forever."

“Oh,” says another, “but I know that a great many Christians are hypocrites.” This is your lion, is it? Well, if there are so many hypocrites, it is time that there should be one honest man, and why should not you be that one? Besides, what have you to do to call God’s people hypocrites? You know that they are not. “Oh, but,” you say, “they are full of faults; all of them are false.” You do not dare say that, do you? If they all were false, nobody would want to be thought a Christian. How is it that a bad sovereign will pass? Why, because there are so many good ones, and because good sovereigns are worth having, and the reason why a hypocrite passes through society is because there are so many genuine Christians to make him seem genuine, and it is a good thing to be a Christian. Instead of judging others, it is time that you sat and judged yourself, and that lion would soon be dead.

“Yes, but I have tried,” says one. Oh that is your lion, is it? But how did you try? You tried in your own strength, I think, and we do not invite you to do that anymore, for your strength is perfect weakness. Had you committed yourself to the keeping of Christ, you would have another tale to tell and another song to sing, for He is faithful and He keeps those that are in His hand. If that is your lion, God grant that you may never hear it roar again. You are not asked to save yourself, or keep yourself, but to submit yourself to the grace of God, and surely that is able to keep you unto the end.

I have this to say to you before I pass to my second head. If there is a lion outside, is there no lion within? That is to say, if you come to Christ and perish, you will most surely perish if you do not come to Him. If you live as you are, what must become of you? If you die as you are, what must be your lot? Without a Savior to wash you from sin, and a Mediator to plead for you before God, what must be your eternal portion? Why, it would be better to go out among a thousand lions than to

stay within and to perish in your sins. The lion within doors, in your case, will certainly destroy you, therefore up and away. Escape as a bird out of the snare of the fowler, that fowler is Satan and his nets are the deceitfulness of sin.

And what if there is a lion outside? Can you not fight it? If you ask the Lord to go with you, can you not contend with the lion and destroy him, even as David did? Saints of old have overcome through the blood of the Lamb. None of those who are in heaven came there riding upon beds of ease, but —

“They wrestled hard, as we do now,
With sins and doubts, and fears.”

Do you expect to be carried into heaven on a golden couch? You will be mightily mistaken. Did Jesus die on a cross, and are you to be crowned with roses? —

“Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease?
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?”

No, my Friend, there is no dainty road to glory. If you are afraid of difficulty and self-denial, you judge yourself unworthy of the kingdom. Remember, among the condemned, the fearful and unbelieving lead the van! Up, and slay the lion, if a lion there is, and it shall be your joy to find honey in his carcass before long.

If you do not feel that you can contend with the enemy—and certainly you cannot without divine help—can you not cry for help? Our God hears and answers prayer. Why not cry to the strong One for deliverance? Your lion is in the way. Shout, then, for a friend to come and help you and within call, there

stands One who is a wonderful lion-killer. There is the Son of David. Did He not destroy the works of the devil when He was here? Still He shows Himself strong for the defense of all them that put their trust in Him. Call to Him, “My Jesus, deliver me from the lion,” and He will be with you and take the lion by the beard and slay him. Therefore, Sluggard, your excuses will not do. They are broken vessels that hold no water. God help you to be weary of them.

II. We leave our friend, the sluggard, for a little while in the twenty-second chapter of Proverbs, and we turn on three or four pages, till we come to the twenty-sixth chapter, at the thirteenth verse, and there we find the gentleman again. The slothful man is still talking, and he says, “There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets.” Is there any difference between this verse and the first one that I took for my text? Yes, I think there is this difference—that there are **TWO LIONS** here instead of one.

He has waited because of that one lion, and now he fancies that there are two lions. He has made a bad bargain of his delay. He said that he would have a more convenient season, but where is it? It was inconvenient then, because there was a lion. Is it more convenient now? Not at all, for now there are two lions. “There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the street.” That is always the result of waiting, procrastination never profits, difficulties are doubled, and dangers thicken. The countryman who had to cross the river foolishly determined to wait until the water had all gone past, for at the rate it was going, he was quite sure that it must run dry. But when he had waited long, to his surprise he found that a flood had come down from the upland country, and the river was much deeper than it had been before, the river was not dried, but swollen.

Those who think when they are young, that it will be so much easier to seek and to find the Savior when they reach

manhood, are greatly deceived. Those who think that they will wait till their family has grown up, or till they retire from business, for then they will be able to attend to it so much more easily, may live to discover that hardness of heart has come upon them as the result of delay. Life is like an evening, the longer you wait, the darker it becomes. Delay bristles with danger, and the best fruit it can possibly bear is regret. When those who lingered are at last brought to Jesus, how much they wish that the precious years that had been wasted could come back to them. How heartily do they love that promise, "I will restore unto you the years which the locust has eaten"! I said last Sunday evening what I am sure is true—that our dear Savior knew the best time for the soul to come to Him. And what does the Spirit say is the best time? He says, "Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." "Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord." It is now that He gives the invitation, because now is the best time that is likely to come to us.

You see in the second text there were two lions, and according to the Hebrew, they were quite as bad as the other lion, for one of them was a young lion. "There is a young lion in the way." And the second Hebrew word implies a great lion. "A strong lion is in the streets." So, now there were two active enemies—two unconquerable difficulties— instead of one. And as an old Puritan observes, the first time when the sluggard looked down the street and saw a lion lurking on the left, he could have gone the other way. But now when he looked out, there was a lion to the right as well as to the left, and he could not go either way without facing a foe. With a lion at the front door and a lion at the back, there seemed to be no way of escape for him, and this was the wretched result of waiting. And do not some of you who, years ago, hesitated over the difficulties of being a Christian, find more difficulties now

instead of less? When you were 21, you were deeply impressed and conscience was awakened; only you said, “No, not just now. It will be easier soon.” Certain cords of sin held you. But now you are forty. Well, what about it? Are those cords weaker? I believe that now they are like cart ropes to bind you, and whereas sin once chastised you with whips, it is now chastising you with scorpions.

You are getting farther away from the melting power of the gospel, hardening to your own destruction. You can hear a sermon now, and hear it without pricking of conscience. The tears used to flow in years gone by, and you have gone out of this place feeling as if you never dared come into it again, for the preacher had cut and torn you to pieces. He tries to preach just the same, and he hopes that he does, but his words have not the same effect upon you now, as in earlier days. You are gospel-hardened, and that is the worst kind of hardening. You have heard the gospel so long that there is no novelty in it, and you know the excuses so well that you have got to be one of the devil's old soldiers, a veteran used to war. You know how to get over the gospel somehow. Like an old fox, you know all the traps, and cannot be caught in them. You are sticking to the old trick about the lions, but now there are two lions, so you say. Thus you have a double-barreled excuse.

How can I be so unreasonable as to expect you to come out often to a week-night service? You have three or four shops. How can you come out on a Sunday evening, some of you? You have half-a-dozen children. How is it possible that you should give much time to prayer? You are here, and there, and everywhere in your worldly calling! “Oh!” you say, “do not talk to us. Years ago it might have been possible for us to be Christians, but now, how can it be?” Therefore, I say to you young people, hasten to be blest. I beseech you do not delay. An old man took a little child up into his arms, and put his

fingers into the abundant curls of his sunny hair, and he said, "Oh! Dear child, while your mother sings to you and tells you about Jesus, think of Him, and trust Him." "Grandpa," said the little boy, "don't you trust Him?" "No, dear," he said, "I might have done so years ago, but my old heart has got so hard now, nothing ever touches me now." And the old man dropped a tear as he said it. "I wish," said he, "that I had a curly head like yours, and was beginning life like you." Oh! Old man, are you here tonight? Let me tell you a secret. You may become a boy again. I am sure you may, for you may be born again, and he that is born again is but an infant, and starts on a new life with freshly given strength. He shall have softer feelings than nature lends to manhood. He shall have the feelings which grace alone can produce. In a spiritual sense his flesh shall come again unto him like that of a little child, though he cannot grow young again as to his bodily frame. The Holy Spirit can make him a new creature in Christ Jesus. But do not delay! Do not delay; you that are yet young. I am sure that Watts is right when he says —

"'Tis easier work when we begin
To serve the Lord early."

It is assuredly so. Although grace can bring in a person of any age, yet God delights to be found of them that seek Him early. It matters not who he may be, if any man comes to Jesus he shall be received, but yet there is a susceptibility which pertains to the young which has often gone from those who year after year have heard the gospel, and yet have not yielded to its demands.

Oh, I should like you who have two lions to frighten you to cry out to the Lord tonight, to help you to go out and slay them both.

“I am very old,” you say. Well, that is one of the lions, but the grace of God can make a sinner who is a hundred years old into a babe in Christ. “Oh, but I have formed such bad habits.” Yes, those are horrible lions, but those habits can be broken by divine power. “Ah, but my heart is so hard.” Let it soak in the fountain filled with blood, and that will soften it. The Spirit of God—

“Can take the flint away
That would not be refined,
And from the riches of His grace,
Bestow a softer mind.”

He can take away the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. Let us have done with the lions, whether there are two or two hundred, for the Lord will help us. Oh, for a grand lion hunt tonight. Drive away the one and drive away the two. But that can never be while sluggards still are sluggards. The Lord quicken them, and wake them up to real earnestness.

III. That brings me to my last point, which is **NO LION AT ALL**. If there is a man here, who would have Christ, there is, no lion in the way to prevent his having Christ.

“There are a thousand difficulties,” says one. If you truly desire Christ, there is no effectual difficulty that can really block you from coming to Him. You notice that Solomon does not say that there were any lions in the way; he only tells us that the sluggard said so. Well, you need not believe a lazy man. The sluggard said it twice, but that did not make it true. Everybody knew what a poor fool he was, and that it was only in his own imagination that there were any lions at all. Do not believe your sluggish self then, and do not believe the sluggish speeches of others. There are no lions except in your own imagination.

John Bunyan pictures lions at the gate of the interpreter's house, and according to some commentators, he meant the deacons and elders of the church that are outside to watch those who desire to join the church. I am one of those horrible lions, but the happy thought is that the lions are chained. Whenever you wish to join the church, if you will only have courage to come and face us who are the dreadful lions in front of the palace gate, you will find that we are chained. And what is more, if we were not chained, we would not harm you. We do try to roar at those who are not our Master's children, and we would drive away all who come as thieves and robbers, for it is our duty to do so, but if you have a true heart and wish to cast in your lot with the Lord's people, you shall not find that we are any terror to you. We shall be glad to say, "Come in, you blessed of the Lord. Why are you standing outside?" A believer's duty is to join a Christian church, therefore fear not the face of man.

I believe that some will never come to Christ until another and a real lion shall get at them, and then they will run to Jesus for shelter, lions or no lions. I mean if the lions of their sin should ever wake up and roar upon them terribly, then they will not say that there are lions in the way. I used to be terribly afraid to come to Christ until I came to be more afraid of my sin than anything else in the world. And Mr. Bunyan, in one of his books, says that he pictured Christ in his own mind as standing with a drawn sword to keep him away. "But at last," he says, "I got so desperately worried by my convictions of sin that if the Lord Jesus had really stood with a sword in His hand, I would have thrown myself upon the point of it, for I felt that I must come at Him or perish." Let some such desperate resolve impel you to His feet. Say—

“I can but perish if I go;
I am resolved to try
For if I stay away,
I know I must forever die.”

Oh, throw yourself on the very point of the sword, for it is but in seeming that there is either sword or point. Hasten to Jesus, even though He seems to frown, for there is more love in a frowning Savior than in the entire world besides. He cannot mean it. No sinner comes to Him but Christ is gladder to receive him than the sinner is to be received. Nothing charms Jesus like seeing a poor troubled one come to Him. He will in no wise cast out one who does so. If you were walking in the fields, and a poor bird should fly into your bosom for shelter from a hawk, would you take it out of your bosom and throw it away and give it up to its enemies? I know that you would not. You would put your hands about it, and say, “Poor fluttering thing, you are safe enough now. Nobody shall harm you. You have trusted a man that has humanity, and he will take care of you.”

And if you fly into the bosom of Jesus Christ, He will not give you over to your foe, but He will receive you and you shall be His forever. I have heard of a king upon the crown of whose pavilion, when it was pitched, a pair of birds came and built their nests. And he was gentle of heart and truly royal, for he said to his chamberlain, “The tent shall never be taken down till the birds have hatched their young. They have found shelter in a king’s pavilion, and they shall not have to rue it.” And oh, if you will go like the swallows and the sparrows, and build your nests under the eaves of Christ, who is the temple of God, you shall never have your nest pulled down. Yes, and if you can lay your young there, they shall be safe too. There is no place half so secure for our children as Christ’s bosom. All who are in

Christ shall be kept in safety, and shall be cherished and blessed. Oh, come along with you. Come, you that are afraid of lions. There are no lions. The way is clear and open, for Jesus says, "I am the way," and "Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out." Why do you still say that you will come by and by? Do not trifle so. I had almost rather that you cried, "I will not come at all," such perversity might end better than feigned promises and base delays. I pray God to give you a better mind than that, and may you say, "Yes, this very night, please God, I will be saved. The sun has gone down, but there is a little twilight left, and I will yield before darkness quite sets in. I will now trust my Savior and hasten to Him, and seek Him on my knees in prayer." May the Spirit of God sweetly lead you to do this, and oh, our heart will be so glad of it. The Lord grant it, for His dear name's sake. Amen.

1671 THE VALUE OF THE BELIEVER – ISA. 43:4

A Sermon Delivered,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honorable, and I have loved you: Therefore will I give men for you, and people for your life.” — Isaiah 43:4

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Isaiah 42]

ONE OF THE WORST MISTAKES we could make would be to judge our condition before God by our outward circumstances. Know you not that the ungodly have their portion in this life? They increase in riches, their eyes stand out with fatness, and they have more than heart can wish. They are not in trouble like other men, “neither are they plagued like other men,” therefore pride compasses them about as a chain, violence covers them as a garment. Poor creatures, they have no joy in the world to come, and therefore God permits them to have as much joy as they are capable of in this world. They stand upon slippery slopes, and fiery billows rage below. How are they cast down as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. Envy them not, and never dream that they are beloved of God because, like the beast which is fattened for the slaughter, their manger is full of corn, and their rack is overflowing with fodder.

As for the people of God, they are often in great trials. David said of himself, “All the day long have I been plagued

and chastened every morning”—as if his heavenly Father whipped him as soon as he was up, and kept him under the rod all day long. Such chastisements are not unusual in the family of grace. Many of God’s best servants are rich in faith, but extremely poor in pocket; strong in the Lord, but sadly weak in body; beloved of heaven, but abhorred by the men of the world. Many of those, whom the Lord loves most, endure sharp affliction, even as the most precious metal is likely to see the most of the fire. Is it not written, “As many as I love I rebuke and chasten”? “What son is there whom his father chastens not?” The Lord scourges every son whom He receives.

Therefore, never judge yourselves by outward circumstances, for these are not the balances of the sanctuary, and cannot help you to a just conclusion as to your state before God. Everything may seem to go against you, and yet all things may be working together for your good. Jacob was no good judge of his own matters when he cried, “All these things are against me.” He needed Egypt and a sight of Joseph to teach him the reason for the Lord’s dealings. Everything may be prospering with you openly, and yet you may only be as the victim which is covered with garlands when it is being led to be slain at the altar. Everything may be grieving you and yet securing your best prosperity.

Our Heavenly Father has, I think, given us the words of the text and the context by way of comfort in reference to His outward dispensations. If God has a favored people whom He has chosen, upon whom His distinguishing grace has lighted to make them great and honorable, you would suppose that the second verse of this chapter would run thus—“You shall not go through the waters, for I will be with you to keep you out of them; neither shall you pass through the rivers, for I have bridged them on your behalf. You shall never go through the fire, and therefore you shall not be burned. Neither shall there

be any fear that the flame shall kindle upon you, for it shall not come near you.” There is no such word of promise. It would be contrary to the whole tenor of the covenant, which always speaks of a rod, and of the chosen passing under it. On the contrary, it is here supposed and taken for granted that we shall have to pass through fire and through water to get to heaven, and it is put thus—“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you: when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned.” And then it comes in, in the language of our text, that although the chosen are bound to go through fire and through water, yet they are precious in God’s sight. Oh true believer, rest in perfect peace! Although you have to pass through unnumbered afflictions, yet you are honorable and safe, for the Lord will make any sacrifice that He may secure your safety. He will give all mankind for you, for the word is not in the singular, “I will give man for you,” but He will give all things, yes, whole nations of men for you, sooner than you shall perish, so determined is He that you shall be saved.

Come, then, dear tried people of God—come to the text and see whether you can find comfort in it. I know you will not be disappointed if the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, shall apply it with power to your souls.

I. First, THE LORD COUNTS HIS PEOPLE TO BE PRECIOUS.

The text was spoken of a nation, whom He had chosen, but what is true of a nation is true of each individual in that nation, at least, what is true of Israel is true of every Israelite. If God has loved His church He has loved every member of that church. And if His church is precious in His sight, so is each individual believer. Is not that a blessed word, “You were precious in My sight”? In your own sight you appear to be unworthy, insignificant, and undeserving, but yet you are precious in the sight of the Lord. I know that when the Lord

gives us a soul-humbling experience, we are made to feel as if we were worthless worms, good-for-nothing, incapable, ungrateful, undeserving, ill-deserving, and hell-deserving. “God be merciful to me a sinner,” is often the cry of the most sanctified child of God. Yes, and the nearer he gets to the likeness of Christ, the more he mourns over his deficiencies, till he is like David who had spoken all through the 119th Psalm of his love to God’s word and his delight in it, and yet concluded the psalm by saying, “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant; for I do not forget Your commandments,” as if that were the conclusion of the whole matter, and the utmost to which he had attained. Only the ignorant and self-exalted will talk of their own goodness. Saints mourn because they perceive sin remaining in them. The divine assurance of our text comes in as a blessed counterbalance to our lowly sense of our own worthlessness. The Lord Himself bears witness, “You are precious in My sight.”

A child of God is often far other than precious in the sight of others. Men of God are often as broken pitchers in the sight of men, only fit to be thrown away. If they become earnest, people say that they are almost out of their minds through religion. If they are quiet, their critics remark that they are moping and melancholy. Nothing you can do will altogether please men of the world, they are sure to pick holes in your coat one way or another; it is the way of them. We are not precious in their sight, for they value glitter, and pomp, and riches, and the things which perish in the using. They can do without Christians, so they think. Albeit the people of God are the very salt of the earth, and the light of the world, yet they are utterly despised and rejected. “The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!” Ah, well, but, child of God,

you are precious in God's sight, and that is infinitely more than being precious to princes.

You live in a little room alone, and few know you, and those who do know you do not think much of you, but the Lord says, "You are precious in My sight." Poor old Mary, who has been bed-ridden for years, fears that her friends think her a burden, but let her be comforted, for her best Friend says, "You are precious in My sight." John, the carter, with his large family, small wages, and shabby clothes, yet fears the Lord and walks with Him, and no man may despise him, for to the Lord he is worth more than his weight in gold, and his Redeemer says, "You are precious in My sight." A humble working man has come to worship with the Lord's people, all unknown to fame, he has only one talent, which he tries to use, and he is often downcast because he can do so little for his Master. Yet the Lord says, "You are precious in My sight." And is it not better to be precious in the sight of God than it would be to be precious in the sight of kings and queens and the great ones of the earth? May you not be well content, like your Redeemer, to be unknown and despised, if the Lord does but say, "You are precious in My sight"?

Do you know, sometimes, these words of our Lord quite take me aback? It is so wonderful that I should be precious to the all-glorious Jehovah. I remember being startled once when that word in Solomon's Song came with power to my soul—"You are all fair, My love; there is no spot in you." It shone so brightly on my soul that it seemed to give sunstroke to my faith, and I almost whispered, "I cannot believe it." Yet it is even so. We know how lovers will exaggerate and use hyperboles in their expressions, but the Lord our God speaks not after the fashion of foolish men. He is seriously in earnest in all that He says. But still I was set wondering. Could it be that Jesus could speak thus, in His infinite love to me? I needed to remember

the power of the washing in His blood, and the power of His cleansing Spirit, and the power of His justifying righteousness, before I could understand how He could say such a word to me. Do you not feel a bit staggered as you hear this word, “You are precious in My sight”? Does not unbelief prompt you to say, “Lord, that love-word is meant for somebody else? It cannot mean me.” And yet, if you believe that Jesus is the Christ, you are born of God, and it is to you that this text is spoken, “You are precious in My sight.”

How can this be? I think the text explains it. Read the first verse. “But now thus says the Lord that created you, O Jacob, and He that formed you, O Israel.” It is clear that we are precious to God because *we are His creation*. The first creation was marred upon the wheel by sin. It became a thing without honor and came under the curse. But he that believes in Jesus has been created anew by the work of the Holy Spirit. God has in a very special sense created him. He has gone beyond mere creation, having first created the clay, He has *formed* it. We are not half-made or ill-made in regeneration; we are formed as well as created. The Lord who has given us spiritual existence is daily giving us fashion and completeness. Having first given us life, He has tutored that life. Having planted the tree, He has pruned it. He has created us and formed us, and in both He has worked according to the counsel of His own will. In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth, but afterwards the first chapter of Genesis tells us how God fitted up the heavens and the earth, to be man’s abode, forming what He had before created. The earth, though long before created, was “without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.” In the moment of regeneration we are like that newly-created world, but as by the Lord’s power the world was brought into light and order, so by divine grace the work of

sanctification goes on stage by stage, till Christ is formed in us and we are formed in His image.

Now, because the Lord has done a great work upon us equal to a creation, and a formation, therefore we are precious in His sight. How a man will love a garden when he has laid it out himself! How he will admire the fruit that comes from trees which he planted with his own hands years ago, and to which he has attended himself! When we see our work in anything, it has great value in our eyes. Work is a great creator of preciousness. You know how a little piece of metal, which intrinsically may be scarcely of any worth, can have such work put into it that from half a farthing it can rise in worth to hundreds of pounds. Skilled, artistic work makes the most common material to be as precious as a gem. Think, then, of what the Lord has worked upon us. We who seemed to be intrinsically so worthless have the workmanship of God upon us, for “He that has worked us to the same thing is God,” and by that workmanship, that creation, that formation, He has made us to be very precious things. From an old horseshoe the artificer may make a clasp of rarest workmanship and thus has the Lord done with us. Though we were like the common pebbles that lay in Jordan’s brook, the Lord has of those stones raised up children unto Abraham. Though we were but as the dross that is cast out at the pit’s mouth, to be left there as worthless, yet the Lord has taken us up and transformed us into silver and gold, that we may make a crown for Himself, world without end. Has He not said “This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise”? Oh, but this is sweetly clear and sure, the creative work of God upon us has made us to be precious in His sight.

But what does He say next? “I have formed you: I have redeemed you.” I wish I could sit down in that chair and let somebody else talk of this most divine subject. Here is the

reason why we are precious in the sight of the Lord—it is because *we have been bought with precious blood*. Can we contemplate the sufferings and the death of Christ for us without feeling that whatever He intended to accomplish by such sufferings and death must be an object most precious in His sight, an objective that He will certainly achieve?

Some seem to fancy that Christ either had no purpose at all in His death, or else that He played at haphazard, redeeming all men, or no men, as the chance might happen to turn out. They say that He was a substitute for all men, and yet it is clear that many of them are lost—lost, though redeemed with His precious blood. I am loath to repeat the statement, though to them it does not appear to be profane. I know this—I would not willingly give my life on a speculation. I must be well convinced that a grand result will certainly follow, or I will not even risk my life if I can help it. And I cannot conceive the infinitely wise God, our Savior, as laying down His life for any purpose but that which will most certainly be accomplished. What He bought, He will have. What He purchased, He will receive. If a thing is bought with your money, it becomes precious to you. And though it may be a bad bargain, yet if it cost you dearly, you do not intend to lose it. You value it too much to throw away that which has cost you so dear. And Christ has not thrown His blood away, or wasted it, or spilt it on the ground for nothing. He shall see of the travail of His soul.

Come back to a view of yourself. Have you believed in Jesus? Then you know by that mark, that He has redeemed you from among men. Do you believe in Jesus? Then you are of His sheep. Christ laid down His life for His sheep. Do you believe? Then you belong to His church of which we read, “Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it.” You see the

specialty of His redemption as coming to those of you who believe in Him; therein you have the key of our text.

Now you can understand why you are precious, redemption makes you so. “I bought that woman,” says Christ. “Amidst my pangs and groans and death I saw her—saw her through the tears that filled My eyes. I also saw that man; My prescient love beheld him in his sin, and beheld him as redeemed from them when I bore his sin in My own body on the tree.” Oh, blessed thought! We must be precious to Him who has not only created us, but has laid down His life for us, “the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.” The agony and bloody sweat cause me to understand my Lord’s saying, “You were precious in My sight.” In any case, the Spirit of God in our text assures us that such is the fact, we are precious unto God—the jewels of His crown, the apple of His eye, the portion of His possession.

Another blessing of grace is mentioned in the chapter, and that is that God has *called us*. “I have called you by your name; you are Mine.” There is a work of grace called effectual calling, by which the Spirit of God calls out the redeemed from among men. They lie with the rest of the fallen mass, knowing nothing about what Christ has done for them, ignorant, indifferent, and insensible. But free grace calls them out from the mass of the dead. Many calls are given to them in the gospel—to them amongst others—indeed, to all men, for the call is to all the sons of men, but they regard not the invitation. Even the elect refuse the voice of the Lord till God in sovereign grace puts power into the word, and then it comes as a personal call; as it is written, “I have called you by your name.” Then the summons of love comes effectually, and they are made willing in the day of the Lord’s power. Being effectually called, they spontaneously answer, “When You said, Seek you My face, my heart said unto You, Your face, Lord, will I seek.” Jesus knows

when He called you, do you remember it? Some of us remember it as distinctly as ever the two sons of Zebedee recollected when Jesus called them as they were fishing, and promised to make them fishers of men. The day is as distinct to us now, as it must have been to Matthew when he sat at the receipt of custom, and Jesus said unto him, “Follow Me.”

We have been called, as surely called as the child Samuel when he was upon his bed, for our spiritual ears have heard the voice of God, and our hearts have answered, “Here am I; for You did call me.” Yes, beloved, we know our calling, and it is well for us to be fully assured that therefore we are precious in the sight of the Lord. Effectual calling has made us so. He drew us, and we followed. He called us, and we answered to the call. Therefore are we dear to the Father to whom we have returned; dear to Jesus by whom we have been reconciled; and dear to the Holy Spirit who has led us into this grace.

We have been *ever since kept by His rich grace* and preserved, and this also has endeared us to the Lord. Those to whom we have shown great favor are sure to be dear to us. We love those to whom we have acted lovingly. The Lord has daily called us from one stage of grace to another. “Friend, come up higher,” is a word that we hear from time to time, and we expect to hear it soon for the last time when He shall bid us rise from earth to heaven. Then will He say, “Friend, come up higher, and we shall sit down in the highest room.” He is always calling, and by His grace enabling us to answer the call, and therefore we are precious in His sight.

But I do not care so much to think over the reasons as wish to get you to grip the truth, each one of you on his own account. Perhaps you are downtrodden and despised, oppressed and depressed, your spirit sinking within you? If so, rejoice that you are precious to God. You are nobodies, so the world says, and

so you think, but for all that, the Lord declares that you are precious in His sight.

Now, will you try to think that many and many a poor soul that as yet knows not Christ is as precious in His sight as you are? They are His sheep, though not yet the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand —

“Oh, come! Let us go and find them,
In the paths of death they roam.”

Let us go and hunt up the lost jewels which belong to Jesus. All the treasures hid in a field have not yet been found. God has a chosen people in the back slums, in the lowest haunts of vice, let us go forth and seek them. “I have much people in this city,” He said to Paul, and I believe that He has much people hidden away in the holes and corners of London. If poor fallen men and women are precious in His sight, though they may be the outcasts of the streets, though they may be thieves and drunks, let us never despise them. Let us never say, “Oh, I cannot be associated with such!” “Precious in My sight,” says Jesus, as He points to them, “Precious in My sight,” as He points to the poor fallen woman. “Precious in My sight,” as He mourns over the blasphemer. Go after the degraded haunter of the street, and never rest until you have the happiness of bringing her to Him who bought you and bought her with His most precious blood.

Brethren, do you not think that if you are precious in Christ's sight, then everything that has to do with Him, ought to be precious to you? Oh, how you should value Christ! Is He not your all in all? Everything that is connected with Him ought to become dear to you. Some of His people are very disagreeable people, and we cannot feel much joy in their company, but we must still love them. Remember what

Augustine said, he declared that he loved every man that had “*aliquid Christi*”—anything of Christ—about him. “Precious in My sight,” says Christ of this brother and that. Let them, then, be precious to you, and be it your joy to cheer them and succor them for Jesus Christ’s sake.

Think once more. If you are precious in God’s sight, do not despise yourself so as to fall into the follies and vanities which please other men. The ungodly may do as they please, but here is a charming check for you, Jesus says of you—“Precious in My sight.” Then, Lord, I cannot go into amusements which some others so much delight in, for if You have said, “Precious in My sight,” I cannot be found among the giddy throng. If there is a sin that once was sweet to me, and I find it to be sweet to many of my friends, I will abstain from it with all my heart, and try to get them to do so also, since You have taught me that I am precious in Your sight. Nobility has its obligations. We do not dream of seeing princes of the blood running in the streets and playing with the children of the gutter. No, something better is expected of them. If you are precious in God’s sight, let the obligations of discriminating grace lie upon you; maintain a holy separation from the world. Heirs of heaven, behave as such. Children of the eternal King, remember the dignity of your condition, and so walk that you live not inconsistently with what the Lord has done for you.

That is our first point. In the Lord’s esteem His people are precious.

II. Now, secondly, they being precious, He adds another epithet. “Since you were precious in My sight, **YOU HAVE BEEN HONORABLE.**”

Is not that another blessed word? Alas, how many of God’s people were the reverse of honorable before they knew the Lord. Many a dishonorable thing they thought, and said, and did and it is the dishonorable life that makes the dishonorable

man. They are honorable now, but possibly they were children of shame at their birth. Perhaps they lived in sins that are not to be mentioned lest the cheek of modesty should crimson, and yet they are honorable now. Perhaps they went so deep in sin that the laws of their country convicted them of crime, and yet—wonder of divine grace!—as soon as ever they are precious in God's sight they are honorable. All the past is blotted out. It shall be remembered against them no more forever. They take their rank among the honorable. I do not know that I should care to be called "right honorable" among men, for there are too many right honorables whom we could not honor, patrons of the race course, the betting ring, and the prizefight. The name is a falsehood when applied to debauched men whose only worth, lies in their money.

But an "honorable" that God calls honorable is honorable indeed. Although, previously, that poor soul may have been everything that was dishonorable, Jesus says, "I have blotted out your sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud, your iniquities," and that free pardon puts him among the honorable. Those who trust the Lord Jesus are honorable, "for unto you that believe he is honor." The humblest child of God that lives is honorable, for he belongs to a right worshipful family. An angel thinks it an honor to wait upon him, bearing him up in his hands lest he dash his foot against a stone. "Honorable!" Why, all nature honors the elect of God! The saints of God are the center of all providential arrangements. Next to God, for the church all things exist, for so the Lord has put it, "He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel," and "all things work together for good to them that love God." The stones of the field shall be in league with them and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with them. The Lord gives a charge to all the powers of nature that they are on the side of the man who is on the side of God. Honorable! Why,

we are the most conspicuous objects of the divine forethought from all eternity—the most esteemed subjects of the guardian care of heaven in all time, and we shall be the most eminent objects of divine love throughout a whole eternity when the Lord shall make known, through the church, to wondering angels and principalities, the manifold wisdom of God. “Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honorable.”

Now let a poor child of God tell how he believes that he is honorable.

First, dear brethren, we are honorable by *birth*. Some are proud because they have been born of fathers who have been made baronets, or elevated to the peerage in years gone by, thus by birth they are honorable, that is the way people talk, and it must be so among men as long as there are classes and ranks. Descended from the King of kings, each saint has a lineage before which the pedigrees of princes grow stale and humble. He that is “begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,”—he that is born of the Spirit of God—he into whom God has infused His own nature—he is honorable by birth, in a sense which none can dispute. Not by blood, but by the new birth which comes from the Spirit of God, every child of God is made both precious and honorable.

Next, we become honorable by our *possessions*, for men pay honor to those who become millionaires and are immensely rich. Alas, the gains may have been dishonorably made, and then the honor that comes of wealth is a stench in the nostrils of good men and angels. But, brethren, our wealth that we get by our new birth is such that we are richer than the wealthiest of worldlings, and must in consequence be honored. Paul says, “All things are yours—whether things present, or things to come, or life, or death, all are yours, and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.” What an estate is that which belongs to every

heir of heaven, for we are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ,” and thus we become indeed honorable.

Yes and the child of God, becomes honorable in *rank*. To be a child of God is to occupy a rank surpassing all human dignity. A child of God is a “prince of the blood imperial,” I was about to say, but still better than that, he is a prince of the divine line, he is a child of God. No dignity can excel this. One who is a child of God has a rank which he could not wish to change though all the empires in the world should lie at his feet to tempt him with their glories.

Beloved, we then become ennobled by our *relationship*. When a person is related to some great man, he has a degree of honor reflected upon him. It may be by marriage that the relationship is made, but it is all the same. Honor comes with honorable connections. Since, then, we are related to God by the spiritual birth, and united to Christ by the spiritual marriage, we are partakers of the honor of God our Savior. Beloved, we are now the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when Jesus shall appear we shall be like Him. Jesus is, “the first-born among many brethren,” and we as the younger brethren are all honorable.

We are honorable by *calling*, for He “has made us kings and priests unto our God,” and these among men are the most noteworthy of all callings, none more honorable than priests and kings of God’s own making. By divine grace we have become honorable by *character*, for the Lord has sanctified His people and made them to love that which is good and right, and to forsake that which is evil. By His grace they shall no longer bear the fruits of the flesh, but the fruits of the Spirit shall be in them and abound, and so, being honorable according to God’s calling, they shall become honorable by a conversation agreeing therewith. Theirs is an honorable *life*, they live for an honorable purpose, they are quickened by an

honorable spirit, they are wending their way through an honorable destiny on earth to glory and honor and immortality and life eternal. Therefore may they rejoice that God has made them honorable.

The lesson to be learned from it is, do not let any child of God be bashful, shamefaced, and cowardly in the presence of men of the world. It becomes us to be lowly and meek with all humbleness of mind, but not with any kind of meanness, so that we would flatter the great, or cringe before the powerful. We are greater than they, for they know not the Lord, and he is greatest who knows best the Great One. Why should we fear their threats? Who are we that we should be afraid of a man that must die? Who are we? We ought to feel ourselves to be too honorable to fear the son of man who is crushed before the moth. “Princes did sit and speak against me,” said David, “yet I declined not from Your statutes.” Who are princes? If they speak against God’s children, they speak against those who are more honorable than they. They revile their superiors, compared with who they are but mimic monarchs.

Do not therefore go about with the bearing of a menial, but with the air of a king. I would like to walk as Abraham did among men. He was every inch a king, the sons of Heth could do no other than respect the princely patriarch. Poor Jacob is often beggarly with his bargains and his tricks; he cuts a sorry figure as compared with his majestic grandfather, the Father of the faithful. Abraham so trusts his God that he is the independent man everywhere, he lends, but he does not borrow; he is the head, and not the tail. When he stands before the king of Sodom, how more than royal his bearing! The king would give him the spoils which were, indeed, justly his according to the laws of war, but he replies, “I will not take from a thread even to a shoelace, lest you should say, I have made Abram rich.” The child of God is too honorable to take

what other people would take, if thereby he would stain his dignity. He may often feel it unbecoming his dignity to do that which is lawful. He may therefore choose a more excellent way. Lions will not be found stealing little bits of meat like cats, or feeding on carrion like dogs. It is not for eagles to hawk for flies, and it is not for children of God to stoop below the glorious level of their new birth. "Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honorable." Oh, you right honorable, take care to act honorably.

My brethren, we do not wish to be called "reverend" any one of us, but God has called us honorable, and it would be a fairer title by far for us to wear. Reverence, surely, we can never claim, that belongs but to one. But if He calls us "honorable," I venture at least to call you "right honorable." O you right honorable, always live as right honorable. Do not let us hear of you that you spoke in a fit, for that is to act like a spoiled child. One of God's honorable in a passion, uttering burning words! This will never do. One of God's children doubting God, afraid to trust his heavenly Father, and trying by little tricks of trade to get on, instead of being honest! Is this a conversation such as becomes the household of faith? Is not this the reverse of what becomes us? There is one that cannot forgive his brother, is that seemly? He will not speak to his friend because of some small offense, is that honorable? Some that profess to be God's children seem to think it a poor business to be a Christian. Brethren, think not so. Have a high idea of what a Christian ought to be, and then pray the Spirit of God to raise you up to it. If you have been called a king in the eternal covenant, I pray that you may be anointed to your office with a horn of oil by the divine Spirit, that about you there may be regal qualities such as become a king, and a sacrificial life such as befits a priest, for God has indeed made you to be a king and a priest unto Him.

III. Be of good cheer, then, as you pass on to the third point. “Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honorable, **AND I HAVE LOVED YOU.**”

Ever since the Lord has manifested Himself to you, He has loved you manifestly. He has not only told you of His love in the secret of your soul, but He has publicly acted in love to you. I desire you to get that truth fully into your mind. Ever since the time of your conversion—yes, and long before that— ever since He loved you, He has acted in love to you. “Oh, but I have been very ill, frequently bound to my couch, and my bed has been as painful to me as though it were of red-hot iron.” Yes, yes, but He has loved you, and put you to that pain to glorify Himself and to benefit you by preparing you to receive more of His love, and to manifest more of it to others. “Since you were precious in My sight, I have loved you.” Is there not a well of delight in that assurance? “Oh, but I have been in the dark as to my Lord. I have not walked in the light of His countenance, and He has hidden Himself from me. I have had many questions in my conscience as to my condition before Him.”

Just so, because He loved you He would not let you be happy unless you were in a right state before Him, and He has put you in the dark because you were not fit to be in the light. He loved you, and He saw you to be a naughty child, and therefore He resolved that you must be put in the corner. The Father could not smile, for to be smiled on by God when we are indulging in sin would be a curse to us, and not a blessing. Our Father loves us too much to let us be at ease in sin. Will you try to remember that the Lord has loved you and kept on loving you all these years, and He has never thought an unloving thought towards you nor has He done an unloving action towards you in any shape or form. He has looked out for wise ways in which to exhibit His love to you, and He has

done the very best for you. He has loved you infinitely; His whole heart has been set upon you. The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout all the earth to show Himself strong on the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards Him. God loves you as much as if there were not another saint for Him to love. Can you believe that? God puts the center of His love in Christ, and if there is any other center of His love, you are in it, because God is a circle whose center is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere, and you and I and each one of us may thus be the actual center of the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Although there are ten thousand times ten thousand of my brethren for God to love, He does not mean to love me any the less. If I have so many to love, I must cut my heart in pieces, but His great heart is so capacious that He gives the whole of it to you and the whole of it to me. Even as the Father loved the Son, so He does love His people. Jesus says, “As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Continue you in My love.” He is loving you now. The great Father is looking down upon you with infinite delight and boundless affection at this instant. Cheer up, then! Cheer up! Let nothing distress you. Did I hear you complaining that you are all alone? Are your father and your mother dead? Perhaps years ago. The friends that you have been living with have been taken away, and you are friendless and alone. Some of us, who have got to middle life, or past it, see our dear old friends going to heaven in flocks. We sometimes wonder what we shall do for friends when we grow old ourselves, if we are spared. But that is a sweet word, “When your father and your mother forsake you, then the Lord will take you up.” “Even to your old age I am He, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.” Is God, thus loving us? Then

it is enough. Let us fall back upon that love and say, “Your love, my Lord, is all I can desire.”

Well, now, if God loves us so, shall we not love Him? Awake, O heart that sleeps! Awake, awake, and give back to God all the love of which you are capable. And shall we not love poor sinners for Christ’s sake? Shall we not try to love them to the Savior? The greatest converting power in the world, next to the Holy Spirit, is the power of human love. Men are never saved by scolding, and an angry preacher is not likely to bring many to a loving Savior. We must love sinners so much that they must be saved, or we will break our hearts. When we get to that, God will make us to be instruments in His hands of gathering in His chosen. Let us turn into flames of love. Oh, to be transmuted! Someone said, “What is Basil?” and then he dreamed that he saw a pillar of light and heard a voice saying, “This is Basil.” Oh that we might be, in character, like burning and shining lights, and may our light and fire be love to God and love to men. Surely He that has made us precious in His sight, and made us honorable, and loved us so, deserves that, for His sake we should go out and seek His lost precious ones and bring in the dishonorable, that they may be honorable. If it is written “I have loved you,” let us feel the force of heavenly love, and serve the Lord with gladness.

Now, poor souls, you that have had no share in all this text, you may have a share in it. Is there anyone here who is empty? Christ has come on purpose to fill him. Is there a soul here that is hungry after God and salvation? Then it is written, “He has filled the hungry with good things, but the rich He has sent empty away.” Sinners are scarce articles. “Why,” you say, “they are common as blackberries.” Yes, those that will say they are sinners, but those who truly feel that they are sinners are very scarce. A sinner is a sacred thing; the Holy Spirit has made him so. He that really knows his sinnership is redeemed by Christ.

He is the man that Christ came to save. He is the man to whom infinite blessings belong. He is the man who may lift up his heart unto God and rest in Jesus. You blind eyes, Christ came to open you. You prisoners, Christ came to set you free. You good-for-nothings, you ungodly ones, you sinful, you that have no good thing in yourselves, but are despairing at the gates of hell, “unto you is the word of this salvation sent.” Christ has come to save such as you are. For proud Pharisees, Christ has nothing. He came “not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” He came not to fill the full, they want it not, nor did He come to heal the healthy, they need it not. But He comes to save you that have no good thing about you—that have no good feelings within you. You that have no broken hearts, He comes to give you broken hearts. You that have no faith, He comes to give you faith. You that have no repentance, He comes to give you repentance—

“True belief and true repentance,
Every grace that brings you nigh!
Without money,
Come to Jesus Christ and buy.”

And oh, what a surprise it will be for you to hear His Spirit saying to you by and by, “Because I loved you before the world was—because I had chosen you—because I had determined to save you, because you were precious in My sight, therefore you are honorable, and I have loved you. Come and rejoice in Me.”

God help you to do so, for Jesus' sake, Amen.

1672 THE VOICE BEHIND YOU – ISA. 30:21

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, July 23, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk you in it, when you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left.’” — Isaiah 30:21

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Isaiah 30]

ON THE SABBATH BEFORE LAST, we spoke concerning “the still small voice.” After the thunder and the fire and the earthquake had passed away, for the Lord was not in them, there came a still small voice unto Elijah, which reached the prophet’s heart, and brought him back to his former condition of communion with God. This hopeful morning we shall hear that same “still small voice” actually speaking a warning and teaching the word, and we shall see how it operates upon the sinner, reaching both his ear and his heart. God calls to the rebellious, and by His gentle word they are brought to His feet with repentance, turned from their evil wandering, and led in the way of obedience.

The word behind us which is spoken of in the text is mentioned as one among other covenant blessings. No “if” or “but” is joined to it. It is one of those gracious, unconditional promises upon which the salvation of the guilty depends. There are many comforts of the new life which depend upon our own

action and behavior, and these come to us with “ifs,” but those which are vital and essential are secured to the chosen of God without “but” or “perhaps.” It shall be so, God declares it shall, and He has power to carry out every jot and tittle of every promise that He makes to His people. I shall ask you at this good hour mainly to admire the free and sovereign grace of God in making such a promise as this to anybody, and especially in making it to a people whom He speaks of as “a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord.” He severely upbraids them, and then in great patience, He says to them, even to them, “Your ears shall hear a word behind you.” God’s Grace is marvelous in itself, but its most marvelous point is the singular channel in which it chooses to flow, it runs down into the Dead Sea of sin and makes the waters pure.

I. I invite you to notice first of all **THE POSITION OF THE WANDERER** to whom this special blessing comes. How does God find men when He declares that they shall hear a word behind them? First, He finds them *with their backs turned to Him*. This is clear enough, if you remember that the word is to be heard “behind” them. The sinner has gone away from God, and God calls after him from behind. He has turned his back upon his true Friend, his best Friend, his only capable Friend, but that Friend does not therefore change His temper and resent the insult. No, He is provoked to a love more pleading and persuasive than ever, and calls to him to come into the right way. After having transgressed willfully and wickedly, the rebel now distinctly turns his back on God and truth. According to the Lord’s complaint, “they have turned unto Me the back, and not the face.” He turns his back on the law, on the gospel, on mercy, on eternal life. He turns his back on the adoption of the great Father, on pardon bought with the blood of Jesus, on regeneration which can alone be worked by the Holy Spirit. He

turns his back upon holiness, happiness, and heaven. He turns away from sunlight, and wanders down into deeper and yet deeper night, striving to get away from God and holy influences. Yet the Lord follows him, and with a voice of touching love and tender compassion He calls to him, “This is the way, walk you in it.” The word of warning, instruction, and entreaty follows the wanderer, and with ever-increasing pathos beseeches him to turn and live. Again and again the wise, earnest, personal voice assails his ears, as if love resolved that he should not perish if wooing could win him to life. The wanderer seeks not God, but His God seeks him. Man turns from the God of love, but the love of God turns not away from him.

What matchless grace is this that God should thus call after sinners when they openly renounce His rule, and flee from His mercy. Oh, if the Lord had turned His back on us, where had we been? If He had given us up to our own devices, and left us to ourselves, then our eternal ruin would need but a few more days and months to consummate itself, and we should be driven forever from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power. Have we not said unto God, “Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of Your ways”? If He had replied to us, “Depart, you cursed, into everlasting fire in hell,” it had only been the echo of our own words. When we said to Him, “Depart,” suppose He had turned round and said, “Depart, depart yourselves”? But instead of that, while we turn ourselves deliberately away from God, He still calls after us. He will not let us go. We have a freedom of will, but it is by that freedom of will that men are damned, since they will not come unto Christ that they might have life, but they will to follow the devices and desires of their own hearts. Free will, thus held in chains by evil lusts, becomes the most destructive agency in the world. But, blessed be God, He has freedom of will too, and

that freedom of sovereign grace will not have its hands bound or its lips closed, but it will act and speak in omnipotent love. So when the Lord sees us in the wantonness of our wickedness, dead in trespasses and sins, His great love with which He loves us seeks us out, and from the lips of that love come tender accents bidding us return to God, saying, “This is the way, walk you in it.”

Observe that these persons had not only turned their backs on God, but *they were going further and further away from Him*. Of course, when you have once turned your back upon the right, the further you travel the more wrong you become. They were not content to be near to God, even with their backs to Him, but they hastened away. They are eager and quick to escape from their own mercy. Like the prodigal, they are not satisfied till they get into “a far country.” They cannot rest in the same land with their God. They journey with all speed away from the Lord, and the greater the distance that they can set between themselves and their Father the more are they at ease. In forgetting God they find a horrible peace, the peace of death, a peace which will stupefy them into eternal destruction. Now, it is while they are thus going hot foot away from God, further and further every day, madly rushing along the downward road, never satisfied with the sin to which they have attained, flying from God as if He were their terror and would be their destroyer, it is even then that the word sounds behind them and they are startled into thought. They have a powerful voice pleading with them thus—“Turn you, turn you; why will you die, O house of Israel? This is the way, walk you in it. The way you are now pursuing is not the way to peace and safety; return at once, for this is the way, walk you in it.”

Here again I admire the overflowing riches of the grace of God, that He should call men to Himself when they are altogether taken up with other things, when every thought, and

every word, and every act is in rebellion against Him. Paul says, “Does God care for oxen?” But here is a far greater wonder, “Does God care for worthless rebels?” When a chosen man is desperately set on mischief, determined to destroy himself, God is yet more determined to save him. The two determinations meet, and we shall see which of the two will prove itself the stronger one. We soon find that the determination of God overcomes the determination of man. The iron breaks the northern iron and the steel. “Thus says the Lord; your covenant with death is broken, and your league with hell is disannulled,” for there was a prior covenant, a covenant of grace made by God Himself, which stands fast forever. And there was a prior league which God made with His Son on our behalf, and that league shall overthrow our league with death and hell. Glory be to God that even when the sinner is still rebellious, and shows no signs of repentance, nor is conscious of any wish to turn from the error of his ways, even then, while his heart is black as night, and his spirit is choke-full with rebellion, God calls to him, “Return, O backsliding children.” “They shall hear a voice behind them, saying, This is the way.”

More than this, however, is true. They had turned their backs on God, and were going further from Him, though they were warned not to do so, and *they were pursuing their course in spite of warning*. Read the 20th verse, “Your eyes shall see your teachers.” There they stood, good men, right in the way, entreating their hearers to cease from provoking their God and destroying their own souls. Hear them cry, “Turn you from your iniquities, for this way leads to death: turn you, turn you.” They can see their teachers stretching out their hands with eager persistence, pleading even unto boiling tears, persuading them to turn from the way and the wages of sin. Still they push on, as if eternal destruction were a prize to be sought rather than a doom to be dreaded. Was it not so with many of us in

the days of our unregeneracy? Mother and father endeavored to block up the evil road, in them our eyes beheld our teachers. How they taught us, how they prayed with us, how they labored if possible to turn us from the error of our ways! But we persevered with obstinate resolve. It is hard going to hell over a pleading mother, and equally hard to destroy one's self by pushing aside an earnest father's good advice. But we seemed resolved to do so.

Then perhaps followed Sunday school teachers, full of intense love to us, and how they pleaded! How wisely they set the case before us, and how tenderly they pleaded. Our eyes did see our teachers, but still our eyes would not see the right way, nor would our hearts desire it; we were determined that we would by hook or by crook land ourselves in hell. Our soul was given to her idols, and after those idols we resolved to go. We loved the wages of iniquity, the pleasures of the flesh, the pride of life, the conceit of self-salvation; we loved anything better than our God. And though our teachers were before us, ready to help and eager to teach, we made small account of them. Later in life it may be our teachers were earnest pastors, who could not preach dull, dead sermons, and would not suffer us to sleep ourselves into perdition. They cried aloud and spared not. They were in anguish about us. They gave themselves no rest until we would turn from our iniquities. We could see our teachers, and we had a loving respect for them too, yet we cast their words behind our back. It was of no use to us, we loved iniquity and that way we would go, come what might of it. Yet even then, when we were despising God's prophets and paying no regard to all the words of warning, the Lord was still loving us, looking after us, and crying after us, and saying, "This is the way; this is the way: walk you in it. Come back, come back, come back, you are destroying yourselves; return unto your Father and your God." Why did He not throw the reins on our

necks, and say, “Let them alone, they are given unto idols: I have hewed them with the prophets, I have plowed them with men of God, but all has come to nothing; they have stiffened their necks, they have hardened their hearts, they have made their forehead like unto an adamant stone; therefore let them reap the result of their transgressions”? But it was not so, for God had made this word an unconditional promise of His covenant, “They shall hear a voice behind them.”

One more mark of the ungodly condition of those whom God would call was this; that *they had many ways in which to wander*. Sometimes they roamed to the right hand, at other times they wandered to the left, but they never turned their faces about. Hear you the way to heaven, it is right about face, and then keep straight on to glory. No, but we will turn this way, we will turn that way, we will turn any way except to God. Some men have right-hand sins, respectable iniquities which challenge little censure from their fellows. Not black, but whitewashed sins. Such men are not thieves, they are not licentious, they are not drunks, but their sins take a quieter form. They mock God with their self-righteousness, and insult Him with their prayers, which are no prayers, but only pretences and fictions, and not the real prayers of God’s elect ones.

Others have left-hand sins. They plunge into the sins of the flesh; no vice is too black for them. Only propose to have a little pleasure and they will plunge into any vice to gain it. Yes, and almost without pleasure, altogether without present profit, they will sin as if for sin’s own sake. When they have burned their finger in the candle, they will after that, hold their arm in the fire. When they have brought disease into their bodies by sin, they will return to the evil which caused it. When they have beggared their purse by their extravagant lusts, still they will go on playing the degenerate. When they have filled themselves with despair till they are as a bucket running with gall and

wormwood, and this has been emptied out for them by God's grace, they will fill it up again, for they are infatuated with sin. They find a delight in it, and they will not, they cannot give it up. Shall the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then may they that have been accustomed to do evil learn to do well. Alas, such a miracle has not happened to them. They choose all shapes of evil, but the good they will not have. I say their right-hand sins, their left-hand sins, sins of their life, sins of their heart—they will follow all these eagerly, but unless God by His own omnipotent voice shall call them back, they will not come to Him, to Jesus, to grace, to holiness, and heaven.

Tell it, tell it, tell it; sound it forth beneath the sky forever and ever, that the Lord does call to Himself such wanton wanderers. "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, says the Lord: Turn, O backsliding children; for I am married unto you." Oh, the pity of God, not only for the miserable, but for the wicked, it surpasses thought. "In due time, Christ died for the ungodly." Favor to the guilty is the choicest of favor. We come not to preach salvation to the righteous—for where shall we find them?—but we proclaim it to the unrighteous and to the ungodly. "The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick," and Christ has come after the sick, calling, not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Oh, if anything will touch the heart, it should be this word of free grace, this fact that God does bid men return to Him. Mercy is full of patience. It bears and forbears, and still it cries, "This is the way, walk you in it." Oh, who would be so cruelly ungrateful as to close his ears against its pleadings?

Thus I have spoken sufficiently upon the position of the wanderer.

II. Now, for a little while, we will dwell upon **THE CALL OF MERCY**. "Your ears shall hear a word behind you."

Notice, it is a call that is *altogether undesired*, and comes unsought to the man who has gone astray. He hears the inward call whose voice is, “Return.” He looks for a moment, and then puts his foot down to pursue his journey. “Never,” he says, “will I alter my course,” and he boldly hastens on, though before him lie death and hell. As he is persevering in his ruinous course, the same word again bids him, “Return.” He hears the admonition, but still he pushes on. He must not and will not return from the way of evil. If he could reach a spot where such disturbing voices would never trouble him, how gladly he would hasten towards it. Hence so many altogether forsake the place of worship, they prefer the stagnant pool of stupid obstinacy to the sweet river of the water of life. So far from desiring to be warned, if they could voyage to a distant Tarshish, where voices of warning would never reach them, it would be a delightful journey. And if a ship could be taken, they would, like Jonah, pay the fare to the shipmaster, and secure a berth in the next vessel.

I have heard of one in the backwoods of America who was unloading his furniture, and while doing so, up rode a Methodist minister. “Confound you,” said he, “I have moved half-a-dozen times to get away from you Methodist fellows. I am never comfortable where you are. I will put the things on the cart again, and find a spot where I shall be free from you.” On they went to another clearing, but when they reached it, the first thing that happened, before the man took up his lodging, was the appearance of a Methodist minister. “Where shall I go to get away from you Methodist preachers?” “There is nowhere I know of,” said the minister, “that you can go, for I am afraid if you go to hell you will find some of us there, for preachers have been lost. The very best thing you can do is to yield at once, and let me hold a service to-night in your camp.” That was sound advice, and so some of you will be pestered and

worried as long as you live if you will not come to Christ. Omnipotence has servants everywhere, and these are all charged to warn you of your peril.

I knew one who would not go to a place of worship, and threw every Bible out of his house, but found a copy of the holy Book in his house, and as he cursed and swore, he learned that it was the property of a daughter whom he loved too much to scold, and he was obliged to let the sacred volume rest where she had placed it. A Bible in a house where it is forbidden to be read is a splendid power for good, as he soon discovered. In a house where it is outwardly honored, the Bible may have little influence, but if it gets where it must not be allowed, everybody reads it. If you can make God's Word to be forbidden fruit, Eve will feed on it, and Adam will follow her. Thus the grace of God came into the house, and it would never be expelled. Down by Mitcham, when the lavender is growing, if you take a house there, you will discern a smell of lavender. You may shut the windows and close the doors, but when any persons enter, a whiff of lavender enters with them. You cannot help it. And if you live where the gospel is preached at all, you will be sure to hear it, and be made to know of it. It is God's intention that you should. It is a voice that comes unasked and undesired, but come it does.

"A word behind you," it is *the voice of an unseen caller* whose existence has been almost forgotten. It is not the teachers that speak in this powerful way. The teachers you have seen with your eyes, and they have done you no good. But someone calls whom you never saw and never will see till He sits on the throne of judgment at the last great day, but still He utters a word which cannot be kept out of your ears. It will come to you mysteriously at all sorts of hours crying, "Return, return, return." It will sound often in the dead of night, and make the chambers of conscience ring with its notes. I have known it to

wake a man out of his slumber. I have known it sound in his dreams till he dreamed of hell, and woke up and felt the torment in his own conscience. Though he has done all he could, he has been off to the theater, to the gay party, to the entertainment, to deeper sin, yet still even there the word has haunted him. I remember one who in this very city plunged into all manner of gaiety to try to get rid of this word, yet God met him in a play. Words were used in the performance which touched his conscience, and he fled from the playhouse as from a burning building, fell on his knees, and sought and found the Savior. This call of mercy is the word of a hidden One, you cannot see who it is that speaks, yet you cannot shut your ears to His admonitions nor refuse reverence to His warnings.

This voice *pursues and overtakes the sinner*. Do you see him running—with all his might he is rushing to his own destruction? The word comes, at first, rather feebly—“Return.” He scarcely looks back, but on he flies. Lo, the voice follows. He runs faster from it to show his determination to carry out his own will. The voice still follows him saying, “Return.” Then he stops a minute, but being desperately enamored of his transgressions, he again takes to his heels to fly away from God. Still the word pursues his footsteps, and in pleading accents cries—“Return, return, return, return,” till at last he is constrained to sit down and listen to the word which comes from he knows not where. He cannot understand how and why it comes so home to him, but it is a fulfillment of the promise, it is the word behind him saying, “This is the way, walk you in it.”

That voice, when it comes to sinners is generally *most opportune*, for according to the text they are to hear this voice behind them when they turn to the right hand or to the left. A man may go steadily plodding on in his course of ungodliness and hear no such word of pleading, but often it has happened

that there has been a temptation of a more than usually forceful character, and the traveler was about to turn to the right, and then, at that precise moment, he has heard the word of God behind him giving him warning. His feet had almost gone, his steps had well-near slipped, but the word of the Lord upheld him, and he went not into the deadly sin.

Or it may be it is what I have described as a left-handed sin. The man was carried on to an action which, if he had actually performed it, would have involved his sure destruction, but just as he was about to turn down Deadman's Lane, there came a voice behind him, "Return, return." Often it is so, and even if the man does not return and seek the right way, but keeps steadily on as carelessly as ever, still he is slackening his speed, and he dares not take that left-hand turning into gross sin which he would have followed if the word had not checked him. Even where the Spirit of God does not save a man, it keeps him from many a sin. And when men rebel against the light and will not yield to it, yet still that light has a restraining influence over them of which they may be unconscious. Those who watch them know that if that bit and bridle had not been supplied by the word, they would have gone to an excess of riot which would have been dangerous to others as well as totally destructive to themselves. Blessed be God for the timeliness of the word of mercy. Men delay to come, but God does not delay to call.

And you see, to close this second point, that, it is *absolutely necessary* that the potent word should be spoken and should be heard, for the man had seen his teachers, but they had not done him any good. How often the Lord seems to put us ministers, right up in the corner with our faces to the wall, till we are little in the eyes of our hearers and little in our own eyes. He does so with me, and while I can glorify His name and bless Him abundantly for the many that are brought to Christ, yet I never

take the slightest congratulation to myself about it, for what am I but the driest and most barren stick that there is in all my Master's garden, apart from His watering? If sinners had nothing to save them but us poor preachers, not one of them would be brought up from death and hell. Sinners would laugh at us as simpletons if God were not with us, they do so as it is, and I do not wonder at it, because there is enough in us that deserves to be laughed at. They are ready to despise us, and we cannot be broken-hearted if they do, for we ourselves used to in former days despise the servants of God, and if we do not do so now, it is because the grace of God has made a change in us. We cannot expect better treatment than we ourselves rendered to better men when they pleaded with us. The word behind us is necessary, that "still small voice" which no mortal man can speak, but only God Himself, that inward monition of the conscience, that touching language of the heart which is as much beyond the power of man as to make a world or breath life into an image of clay. Therefore pray mightily to the blessed Spirit that He may breathe on men and save them, and that the word of God may still follow and pursue them till they turn from the way of transgression.

I leave that point. You have seen the position of the Rambler, and the grace of God in the call of mercy.

III. But what was **THE WORD OF THAT CALL?** It is stated at full length, "This is the way, walk you in it." That is the word of the call. It contains within itself, first, *specific instruction*. "This is the way." There is a kind of preaching which has nothing specific, definite, and positive in it. It is a bit of cloud-land, and you may make what you like out of it—God's grace or man's merit, faith in Christ or faith in self. You need to be your own instructor, and then like the child looking into the fire, you will see whatever your own eyes choose to create. Too much preaching is of a kind so mixed that it reminds me of the

showman when his visitors asked, “Which is Wellington and which is Napoleon?” “Whichever you please,” he said, “You have paid your money and you may take your choice.” So it seems to be with many preachers as to doctrine. You may have what kind of doctrine you like so long as you pay your pew-rent. “Cleverly put,” cries one, when he had heard a smart sermon. “Is not that enough?” I answer, it is not enough. We need the sure testimony of revelation, sealed in the heart by the Holy Spirit. Cleverness is not God’s way of blessing men. Conjectures and loose opinions are not worth the breath which is expended in expressing them. The Lord lays down a definite pathway, and He says, “This is the way.” “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.” “This is the way.” Repent and be converted, every one of you. This is the way. “To leave sin, to quit self, to trust in Christ, this is the way.” Something definite is laid down before those who desire to be taught of God, and they are told what is to be done, what is to be received, what is to be given up. “This is the way.” Definite instruction is given. This may not suit the Broad School, but it is exactly what the anxious seeker needs.

This definite instruction may also be said to be a *special correction*. When the voice behind says, “This is the way,” it does as good as say that the opposite path is not the way, for there is only one way to heaven, and there never will be two. And when men hear a voice saying, “This is the way,” it does in effect remind them that the opposite is not the way. If you are going the reverse of the right way, turn from it, and you shall live. How much we ought to bless God that the gospel comes in as a corrective, kills the false and introduces us to the true. May falsehood be slain within us and truth reign there forever. May we leave all other roads, since the Lord has said of one road only, “This is the way.”

It is also a word of *sure confirmation*. “This is the way.” When that is heard many times — “This is the way.” “This is the way,” “This is the way.” When, according to our hymn —

“We hear our Savior say,
‘Come here, soul, I am the Way,’”

if we have already believed it to be the way, we are strengthened in that conviction. Hearing the mysterious word declared again and again, “This is the way,” men grow to believe the truth of God’s word, and out of that by and by there is begotten a living faith in a living Savior. Oh, this is a great mercy, to hear the same thing many times, to hear the voice proclaim again and again and again, “This is the way,” “This is the way.” “Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, Jesus Christ, the righteous.” May the repetitions of the Spirit effectually preserve us from the deadly shadow of doubt, and fix us as a nail in a sure place.

This is followed up by a word of *personal direction*. “Walk you in it.” Do not merely hear about it, but “walk you in it.” Be not content to be critics, thinkers, and considerers, but become doers of the word. “This is the way”—here is the doctrine, “Walk you in it”—there is the practice. Well is it when the Lord by His Spirit speaks to the runaway sinner and tells him what he is to do and to believe. Then He makes the way and the walk to be vividly present—“This is the way, walk you in it” without delay.

This takes the form of *encouraging permission*. Some think they may not come to Christ. They actually ask the question, “May I believe in Him? Is there salvation for me?” Why, says the text, “This is the way.” Do not sit looking at it, “walk you in it.” “But I am so big a sinner.” “Christ is the way; walk you in it.” There is room enough for big sinners in Jesus. “But I

have been so long coming.” Never mind. This is the way, “walk you in it.” Never mind if you have been seventy years coming if you have at last come to the way, “Walk you in it.” “But I am afraid my feet are so polluted that I shall stain the way.” “This is the way, walk you in it.” You are not told to stand on one side and wait till something shall happen to you which shall persuade you to come, but here is the king’s highway, walk you in it. Walking is the simplest of all exercises. There is no great artistic skill required in order to walk, but walking is all that is needed. Come to Christ—come to Him anyhow. Oh soul, tumble to Him somehow, trust Him as best you can, and if you cannot do it without question, trust Him because you must trust Him, since you have nobody else to trust to. Throw yourself into Jesus’ arms. Swoon away on the bosom of Christ. It is the essence of faith, to die into the life of God in Christ Jesus. This is the message which comes behind many a runaway sinner—“This is the way, walk you in it.”

IV. According to our text, success is promised to the word. “Your ears *shall hear* a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk you in it.’” Notice, **THE SUCCESS OF THE WORD** — *your ears shall hear*. God not only gives us something to hear, but He gives us ears to hear with. Oh, the mercy of God! He spreads the table, and then He gives the appetite. He furnishes the garments, and He gives us the sense of nakedness, and so leads us to put them on. Everything that is needed to bear a man from the gates of hell to the gates of heaven, free grace provides. Nothing is left out, the catalog is complete, and He that sends the tidings also opens the ears. “Your ears shall hear.” This is *effectual grace*. Teachers cannot make men hear. They can appeal to the external ear, and after that they have no more that they can do. But God can make men hear. Without violating the freedom of their wills, He can get at their hearts, at their consciences, at their understandings and He can press the truth

home to their souls. When the Lord does it, it is done. When we do it, it is often so done that afterwards it is undone, but verily I know that what God does shall be forever. All that is of nature's spinning will be unraveled one day, but when God spins, it will last throughout eternity.

I take it when we read here, "Your ears shall hear," it means first, that the message of divine love shall come to the man's mind so as to *create uneasiness* in it. He is jauntily traversing the road to destruction. He has chosen the path, and he delights in it. It often looks to him to be a flowery way, a pleasant road. So he walks on, and he would be very happy but for that word behind him crying, "Turn you! Turn you! Turn you!" Just as he was turning down that glade in the wood to the right, where all the flowers of spring are found in profusion, that call troubled him again! He would sooner have seen a serpent hissing in the pathway, or heard a lion roar from the thicket, than have heard that word. The man says, "I never can be quiet. I can see other people going to amusements and pleasures, and they heartily enjoy themselves. But the fact is the more amusement I have, the less I am amused, and I am never more miserable than when everybody else is laughing. Why am I thus?" He thinks he is harshly treated, and is the special object of God's hatred. Everybody else is jolly, but he is gloomy. They can look on the wine when it is red, when it moves itself aright, when it gives its color in the cup, and so could he once look into the rosy depths, but now he sees that serpent at the bottom of it, and he is afraid to touch it lest the draught should turn to venom in his veins. He almost curses the arrangements of heaven which have made him so ill at ease. He wishes he had never heard the parson preach the sermon which bothered him so. He wishes he had never had a godly mother at all that he might have gone straight away into sin, and have been as merry as a cricket. But now there is that voice again behind him, boring its way into

his tingling ears. For a moment he had forgotten it, but here it comes again—"Turn! Turn! Turn! Turn!" He covers his ears, but it bombards his soul with worse than cannonballs, as if the word of God pounded him with shells. He hears the thunders of the cannonade—"Return! Return! Return!" What can he do? He longs to escape from the divine rebuke. The word has made him quiver and quake. So far so good, we shall see next what will happen to him.

After a while, there gets to be a *desire* in his heart. It is only a faint and spasmodic desire—nothing very strong or constant—but there it is, and it cannot be quenched. "I wish I could get right somehow, for in my present condition I am in an evil case. I am sailing in the wrong boat. I wish I could land somewhere, and take the return boat and get to my home. I do not feel at all easy. I wish I knew what to do to be saved. I do know it somehow, for I have heard it every Sabbath day, but yet I do not understand it. I cannot get hold of it. I wish I could, for I am anxious to be forgiven, to be renewed in the spirit of my mind, to be made a new creature in Christ Jesus." "Do you know," he says to someone, "that voice I could not bear, that used to wake me up at nights; that kept me out of pleasure? There is a kind of music in it now. I like to hear it. I wish I heard it so that it had an effect upon me, for I am afraid I shall go down to the pit, and be lost under accumulated responsibilities for having neglected the call of divine love. Oh, help me to come to Christ, for I am anxious to reach Him, but I feel as if I cannot come. I do not feel as I ought. I am told to believe, but I do not know what it means, or I cannot do it—

"I would but can't believe,
Then all would easy be.
I would but cannot, Lord, relieve—
My help must come from Thee."

He is getting on all right, friends. We shall have a better bulletin concerning him directly. He is wonderfully improving, a great deal of the fever of pride has gone out of the man, and we shall have him yet in perfect health. He could not rest because he heard too much of the word behind him, and now he cannot rest because he cannot hear enough of it. He desires that it may penetrate his soul and change him from darkness to light.

What shall happen next? As that voice continues to sound, it pulls him up, and *leads to resolve*. The word of the Lord has put a bit into his mouth and a bridle between his jaws. He does not dare go any further. He sits down to consider. I think I saw him on his knees too, and he is resolved if heaven is to be had, he will have it. If mercy is to be found, he will find it. He will rake the world over, but he will gain the pearl of great price. I think I heard him say he would not go to sleep till he found Jesus. I am glad he has come to that pass. Friend, you are just like the prodigal when he said, “I will arise and go to my father,” only take care you do not end in resolutions. Let it be said of you as of that same prodigal, “He arose, and came to his father.” For all our resolutions are not worth the making unless they are most earnestly and speedily carried into effect. Observe the effect of the word behind the wanderer. Cannot you see the man who was running so fast? He has pulled up. He sees a line drawn across his path, and he must not go over it. He feels that if he goes further he may never have another call of mercy, and this makes him pause. Did not we sing this morning —

“Soon that voice will cease its calling”?

The man is anxious to obey while he may. He is not yet resolved to go back, but he dares not go further.

Watch him, for the voice is calling again, and he is every now and then turning his ear round as if he wanted to hear it. “Return, return, return.” He smites upon his breast and cries, “Would God I could return. I will return, for I cannot perish. I cannot let things go as once I did. I cannot leave everything to take its own way while I take my chance. No, I must have Christ or else I die, and I must have Him soon, or else I shall seal my eternal destiny, and prove a castaway forever. O God, call again, call again. Keep on calling, till I come, for lo, my spirit answers, ‘Draw me, and I will run after You.’ When You said unto me, ‘Seek you My face,’ my heart said unto You, ‘Your face, Lord, will I seek.’”

What will be the last stage of this inner work? Since the man dares not go any further in this wrong way, what is he to do? He cannot turn to the right or to the left, for God has hedged up his way with thorns. Now, listen to what he will say, “I will return unto my first husband, for it was better with me then than now.” This poor soul looks on Him whom he pierced. He did not know he was piercing his Redeemer, but now he sees it all, and while his eyes begin to stream with tears, he turns unto this Christ upon the cross, and finds life while looking at Him. See him get up and feel as if he did not know what to do with himself as he cries—

“Blest cross; blest sepulcher; blest rather be
The man that here did shed His blood for me.”

Now he inquires, “Which is my way? Speak sweet voice. Speak sweet voice. Tell me, which is my way.” And now the voice moves and speaks in front of him, for shepherds go before their sheep. The man looks and sees the Crucified One with pierced hands and feet leading the way, and he delights to follow Him, yes, and he shall follow Him until at the last he

shall see His face in glory everlasting. Redeemed by blood and rescued by eternal power, and brought home to the great Shepherd's fold, to go no more out forever, the sinner shall be filled with gladness. Listen, then, listen, you that have turned your backs on God! Infinite mercy woos you; boundless compassion entreats you to be saved. Turn you, turn as you are, all black and filthy and bemired. Tarry not to mend or wash, but come to Jesus all unholy and unclean, without a single sound speck upon your leprous frame, utterly lost and ruined. Christ died for such as you. I say again, tarry not to improve yourselves, but come now, while mercy's voice invites you, while the Holy Spirit not only entreats, but sweetly constrains. Come and welcome, sinners, come. The Lord bless you. Amen.

1673 WHO IS THIS? – JER. 30:21

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, August 6, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“For who is this that engaged His heart to approach unto Me?” says the LORD. — Jeremiah 30:21

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Jeremiah 30]

I MENTIONED in the reading that there is a very remarkable change of tone in the Book of Jeremiah, at the thirtieth chapter. You read on through the twenty-nine chapters, and you hear nothing but “a weeping and wailing,” while the prophet stands before you, girt with sackcloth, bidding Israel “lament and howl: for the fierce anger of the Lord is not turned back from us.” When you come to the middle of the thirtieth chapter all is changed, you have left the dungeon for the pleasant meads, and you hear “thanksgiving and the voice of them that make merry.” Here flowers of promise glorify the fields, and birds of praise sweeten the air with music. The people are first made to tremble and fear on account of sin, and all faces are turned into paleness, and then the Lord declares His immeasurable grace, saying, “I am with you to save you: though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet will I not make a full end of you.” The condition of the sinful people is brought home to them, and the nation is solemnly told — “Your bruise is incurable, and your wound is grievous. There is none to plead

your cause that you may be bound up: you have no healing medicines. Why do you cry for your affliction? Your sorrow is incurable, for the multitude of your iniquity; because your sins were increased, I have done these things unto you.” And then man’s extremity of misery becomes God’s opportunity of mercy. When and where sin abounds, grace does much more abound, and the Lord displays His wonders of love. He graciously declares—“I will restore health unto you, and I will heal you of your wounds.” The reason for the change is not difficult to find. The prophet is led to speak of covenant promises, such as that in the twenty-second verse, “You shall be My people, and I will be your God.” No wonder that Jeremiah’s strain grew more cheerful and jubilant. Was there ever such a box of perfume as the covenant? Was there ever such a harp of golden strings, all tuned to the music of consolation, as the covenant? Inspired by this subject, he exclaims in the next chapter—“For thus says the Lord; Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations: publish you, praise you, and say, O Lord, save Your people, the remnant of Israel.”

Moreover, he introduces to us that glorious Messenger of the covenant whom we delight in. He speaks of the Messiah, who is the glorious One, who has engaged His heart to approach unto God, and as when the sun rises darkness flees, so when the Savior appears his sorrows vanish, and Jeremiah becomes as eloquent with joy as Isaiah himself. Think no more of Jeremiah as exclusively the weeping prophet, for the flashes of his delight make the night of his sorrow brilliant with an aura of heavenly brilliance.

The answer to the question of our text is the reason why Jeremiah put away his dust and ashes and girt himself with beauteous array. God had, for a while, on account of their great sin, put away His people and wounded them with the

chastisement of a cruel one for the multitude of their iniquities. They could not walk with Him, for they were not agreed with Him. He could not accept their sacrifices, for they were polluted. He could not listen to their prayers, for they were hypocritical. He could not dwell with them, for they were proud-hearted and rebellious. So Zion came to be called an outcast whom no man seeks after. God Himself seemed to have given her a bill of divorce, and to have put her away, but it only seemed that way. In Jehovah's heart of hearts He was still bound to His people, whom He loved with an everlasting love. He could not cast away the seed of Abraham, His friend, and His heart yearned towards the people whom He had loved of old, and borne with in great long-suffering. He had put them under a cloud necessarily, because of their sin, yet He did earnestly remember them still, for He bears witness, saying, "I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My first-born." The Lord loved the distance which sundered His people from Him and He longed to see them approach Him that He might comfort them and satiate their souls with His goodness.

How was this to be done? This was the problem of that age, as it is the problem of all ages. How can guilty man return unto the Holy God? How can there be peace and amity, love and concord between the Judge of all the earth and His revolting and polluted creature man? It was necessary that one should arise who would approach God on the behalf of the people, so that God might be well pleased with them for his righteousness' sake. But where was he to be found? Someone must come to God, and by his coming make a way through which those whom he represented might have access. But where was this representative to be found? Paradise was lost, who was he by whom it could be regained? The question was asked, and in man's ears it seemed to be asked in vain, for it is

written, “There is none to plead your cause; all your lovers have forsaken you.”

“Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto Me? says the Lord.” One was needed to bridge the chasm which divided man from God. Who could do it? God Himself asked the question because He had Himself found the person, and would have us see Him and understand His glorious character. My text comes from Jehovah’s own lip, “Who is this that engaged His heart to approach unto Me? says the Lord.” He sets the Mediator before us and asks, “Who is this?” We are sure that the Lord does not need to ask questions of us that He may gain information from us. “Known unto God are all His works,” and much more must He be known by whom His most grand work is accomplished. Speaking in the name of wisdom our glorious Mediator says of the Lord, “I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.” So the Lord only asks the question for our good to set us thinking.

This inquiry is fitly the sinner’s question, when, trembling and convinced of sin, and led to seek his God, he needs an interposer, one of a thousand, who can put His hand upon the offender and the offended, and reconcile the rebel to his Lord. Therefore, in love the Lord takes up the sinner’s question and answers it by another. Behold a Daysman of Jehovah’s own providing, who can lay His hand upon both—look at Him and answer, “Who is He?” The inquiry is made, I think, with three great designs, upon which I shall speak as I am enabled of the Spirit of God. First, *to direct attention to this glorious person*—“Who is this?” Secondly, *to excite admiration of His wondrous work* “that engaged His heart to approach unto Me, says the Lord.” And then, thirdly, *to awaken our interest in the result of this marvelous approach unto God*, for by it we are permitted and enabled to approach unto the Lord ourselves, and we become His people,

and He confesses Himself to be our God. O, for the Holy Spirit's own teaching, that I may speak aright to you upon this transcendent subject!

I. The question of our text is asked **TO DIRECT ATTENTION TO THIS GLORIOUS PERSON.** "Who is this that engaged His heart to approach unto Me? says the Lord." We read the chapter, and if you have read it attentively, or will do so, you will learn that the person who must draw near to God *must be one of ourselves.* "Their nobles," or their glorious one, "shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause Him to draw near, and He shall approach unto Me." It is clear that a fit representative for men must be himself a man. It would not have been seemly that Adam, the representative of our race, should have been an angel, it was natural that he should be a man. In the same way, as man blocked up the road of communion with God, it was fitting that a man should make a new road, and reestablish divine communion. In Adam we transgressed and died to God, in another Adam must we be restored. If an angel were capable in all other respects of drawing near to God, yet it is clear that he could not do it on man's behalf, for an angel can only represent angels. Each order of beings must be represented by its own kind. Our Lord, as man, took not up angels, for He was not made in their nature, but He took up the seed of Abraham because He had assumed their nature. It needed a man perfect in his manhood to head us up, and stand as our federal head and representative, or otherwise we could not be restored by him.

Now, then, brethren, where is this man to be found? "Who is this?" If he is to come of ourselves, where is he? Not among this assemblage, nor if all the myriads that dwell on the face of the earth could be gathered together would there be found one who could undertake this enterprise—"For all have sinned, and

come short of the glory of God.” We have none of us, that perfection which is required for such a work. How shall a sinner atone for sinners? He cannot make atonement for his own sin, he cannot render unto God for himself and on his own account the righteousness which justice demands of him, and how, then, can he have anything to spare for his fellow men? The best of men are each one in the condition of the wise virgins who, when the foolish virgins said, “Give us of your oil, for our lamps have gone out,” replied, “Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you; but go you rather to them that sell and buy for yourselves.” If the whole roll of history is searched, from Adam’s fall to this moment, there is not one mere man to be found who could represent the race and make an approach for them to God on the ground of personal perfection, for this is God’s own verdict—“All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” The Lord looked from heaven to see if there were any among the children of men that had not transgressed, but He found none, for, “they are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable. There is none that does good, no, not one.”

Nor is it merit alone that is needed, for he that would approach unto the Lord as mediator must be prepared with strength to suffer. Who can sustain the load of human sin? Who can endure the indignation of the Lord against iniquity? Assuredly none of us could do it; the fire would consume us as stubble. O for an interposer, but where can he be found? Who is this who can as man appear for men and by his personal righteousness and sacrifice render man acceptable with God? There was a Man of matchless birth, at whose coming angels sang, for they were told that He would bring glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace. Find Him in Bethlehem’s manger, there He lies, the son of Mary, truly man, one of ourselves, partaker of our flesh and blood, subject to human

needs, weaknesses, and woes, and able therefore to sympathize with us and have compassion upon us, that Man grew up in this world without taint or spot, free from sin whether natural or acquired, and yet He was in the truest sense one of ourselves, so that He is not ashamed to call us brethren. When the malicious eyes of Satan searched Him through and through, he found nothing of evil in Him. He was without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, and He it is—glory be to His name—He it is that has engaged His heart to approach unto God on our behalf. He is the Son of man, most truly, anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows, but still truly fellow with men. Though He counted it no robbery to be equal with God, yet He took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men that He might redeem us from our sin.

Now look at the context, and you will see that the person who must approach God for us *must be a prince-priest*, for He is called “their glorious One” and “their governor,” and yet it is said of Him, “I will cause Him to draw near,” which work of drawing near is in other places ascribed to priests, for these God had set apart for the service of His sanctuary. The Hebrew word “to draw near” signifies that peculiar action of a priest when he stands dealing with God on the behalf of men. The person, then, must be a priest and yet a prince. Who is he and where is he? It is not David, for if David would approach unto God in the office of a priest he must not, he must resort to the priest who has the Urim and the Thummim, and the priest of the house of Aaron must inquire of God for David. This was one distinction between David and Saul; that David knew the limits of his office and never thought to over step it. David and Solomon never attempted to intrude into the holy office, they knew that they were not priests, but only kings, and when Uzzah stood to sacrifice like a priest you know how the leprosy fell upon him. And they drove him out of the house of God

which he was desecrating by intruding himself into the priestly office, and he had to be shut up in a separate house all the rest of his life.

Where shall we find one that even as a priest can really draw near to God for mankind? For remember, brethren, that the priests of old only drew near to God in figure and in metaphor, they could not actually and in very deed do so, for God is a consuming fire. Even when Moses went up unto the mount with God, and did draw near in a certain sense, yet he never saw the face of God, for the Lord said, “You cannot see My face and live.” The brightest vision that Moses ever had was that he saw the skirts of Jehovah’s robe, or what Scripture styles His back parts, for the face of God could not be seen. Mercy draws us near to God in Christ Jesus, but apart from the Mediator an approach to absolute Deity means destruction. Neither among kings nor among priests could the one man be found who could open the way to the Father, and certainly no king-priest could be found—the combination of the two offices falls not to the house of Aaron.

A reverend personage had passed before the camera of history, and left a shadowy trace of himself. But where now is he who was named Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, to whom Abraham gave tithes of all? He was raised up for a special purpose, and no one has inherited his peculiar call. That vision taught us what to look for, but it did not supply the object of our search. It has prophesied the coming of the true Melchisedec, the man without beginning of days or end of years, the man without predecessor or successor, who is greater than Abraham, and abides as both priest and king forever, having once and for all drawn near to God on our behalf. You know Him—the true priest of God, not of the order of Aaron, and the king eternal, immortal, invisible, King

of kings, and Lord of lords. It is He that engaged His heart to draw near to God on our behalf.

The question, however, may be answered in another way, so as to bring out more clearly the matchless person whom our hearts adore at this moment. It was necessary that *he who should draw near to God should be chosen to that office by God Himself, and should be qualified for it by divine power*. “I will cause Him to draw near, and He shall approach to me.” Now, is there anyone among us all that God has ever chosen to represent our fellow men as their mediator, acting as the head of the race, and as such entering into the immediate presence of God on his own merits? We have not, I hope, the presumption to imagine such a thing. “There is one Mediator between God and man, the man, Christ Jesus.” He it is that takes upon Himself our nature and our sin, and then goes in onto God and stands there amidst the blaze of the ineffable light to represent manhood, but there is none else. On Him rested the Spirit of God without measure. The Dove descended on Him in the waters of His baptism, and the Father said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” This was the great One elect of heaven, ordained of the Father before the foundation of the world, and the Spirit of glory and of might did rest upon Him, that He might be equipped for His mighty service, and might engage His heart to approach unto God. This is He who said, “I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore My own arm brought salvation unto Me.”

Moreover, to close this description, He was not only appointed of God and qualified, but He was *one who was willing to undertake the task and ready to pledge Himself to it*. He voluntarily covenanted to do it, as it is written, “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, to do Your will, O God: yes, Your law is My delight.” He engaged His heart to this gracious office, resolving to carry out to a happy issue the work of

reconciliation. Moved by inconceivable, immeasurable love, and counting all the cost, He devoted Himself to the supreme effort. “Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it.” Of His own free will He placed Himself before offended justice to meet its claims, and so He removed every barrier which stood between us and the throne of God. He is that Breaker who has gone up before us, that King who is at the head of all His chosen ones.

Now, where is such a One to be found unless it is the Lord Jesus? I trust many of us have given ourselves up to God and to His fear, drawn by almighty love. But it was never in our hearts to imagine that by giving up ourselves to holy service we could stand before God, and open a way to Him for our fellow men. We are well aware of our incompetence for so grand a task. None of us have struck hands and covenanted with God to mediate, for we could not do it. I dread the thought of seeming to intrude into so divine a work. We are priests unto God, but not mediators for men. When I hear of men pretending to hear the confessions of their fellow men and absolving them of their sins, I wonder that they sleep nights after professing so tremendous an act. I wonder what the power of Satan over them must be that they can rest after having assumed to act as vicars of Jehovah, He having given them no warrant and no authority for such a mediatorial position. Brethren, this hugest of blasphemies may well become the Mother of Harlots, but the Bride of Christ abhors it. But oh, when my eyes rest upon Jesus, the only-begotten Son of God, in human flesh, then I cry, “This is He! Glory be to His name!” Soon, lost in wonder, my soul exclaims, “Who is this? Who is this? What manner of man is this? Who is a God like unto You?” All this in wonder, but not in doubt, for the Lord Jesus can do this great work, and He wills to do it. He resolves and He will not fail nor be discouraged. Glory be to

His name, *He has done it*. He has approached with engaged heart unto God on our behalf, and by His sacrifice has made a way by which each one of us who is willing to do so may now approach unto God, even the Father, without fear. “Who is this?”

Our soul is filled with amazement, but not with ignorance, for we answer this question in a word—He is God Himself, light of lights, very God of very God, veiled in human flesh, who has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. “Who is this?” I answer, it is the Lawgiver Himself who has put Himself under the law, and who has borne the penalties of the law that the law may be glorified, while sin is pardoned, and law-breakers are justified. “Who is this?” It is infinite holiness which has burdened itself with human sin, “For He has made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” Oh, had I words to speak with I would try to extol Him who, being infinitely pure, nevertheless was numbered with the transgressors, who, being incapable of spot, yet did bear upon Himself the enormous and horrible load of human guilt. In His own body on the tree, in flesh and soul, He suffered, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. Mark that word, for it shows His end and objective, “to bring us to God.” This is the way by which He brought us near, even by His own most precious blood. Yes, it is the heavenly One who is blessed forevermore who was made a curse for us. On whom, being everlastingly the object of Jehovah’s love, there fell Jehovah’s wrath on our account. Mystery of mystery! Miracle of miracles! This has astonished heaven and earth and hell. Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews and Son of the Highest, engaged His heart that He might wait upon the Judge of all the earth, and answer for rebellious man with His own life, and so complete a way of access by which

we may rise from our abyss of woes to the bosom of the Eternal.

Though I have thus spoken to the best of my knowledge, I know that I cannot set out before you the full glory of the person of our covenant head. I shall go home saying to myself, “Who is this? Who is this?” and I shall have succeeded in my endeavor if you will each one say, “He could not tell us who He was, he could not reach the height of that great argument, but we shall all through time and in eternity go on wondering and saying, Who is this?” The more we wonder the more shall we love and praise the Lord Jesus with our heart of hearts and say, “He has done all things well. We are made near by Him, never more to be separated from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Thus much upon the Person, how I freely could weep because I speak in words so poor and ill-chosen. I do but hold a candle to show the sun!

II. I come now, TO EXCITE ADMIRATION OF HIS MATCHLESS WORK. If Jesus Christ is to approach God for us it is clear that He must come down into our condition, for He must first descend or He cannot ascend. Naturally there is such a oneness between the blessed Persons of the Trinity that there can be no approaching in their case to one another, but Jesus, though He was forever in the highest sense with God, left His place of glory and took the position of our shame. “Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses.” There He stands, even where we stood by nature. Where we lay in our blood, there He came and engaged His heart to deliver us. He stood at the judgment bar because we had brought ourselves there, He was rejected of the people because we were rejected as reprobate silver, He was condemned because we were condemned, and He was put to death because such was the sentence upon us. He descended into our depths to engineer a

way from the lowest to the highest, to come back from Bashan, and from the depths of the sea, leading the van of the armies of His chosen as they return unto God with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.

This lowly place being taken, behold our Lord actually approaching unto the offended Majesty on high. Though found in fashion as a man, and by reason of His becoming a curse for us, denied the presence of the Father, so that He cried in anguish, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Yet He did approach unto God, He did come near, no, He remains near, able to save them, to the uttermost, that come unto God by Him. He has passed under the cloud, and the darkness, and through the consuming fire, and now He is the Lamb in the midst of the throne. He has gone into the Holy of Holies and revealed the mercy seat. He has bridged the great gulf which sin had made. “It is finished,” He said, before He bowed His head and gave up the ghost. The pathway is open, every gulf is filled, every valley is exalted, and every mountain and hill laid low. It is finished—the way from man to God has been already trod by myriads of cleansed feet, for our glorious One has cast up the king’s highway and made straight paths for our feet. Come, let us tread the road. With holy confidence let us draw near unto God.

Our Lord with all His heart desired to do this. He “engaged His heart” to perform it. Before all worlds His master purpose was to approach unto God as man’s representative. He is styled, “the Lamb slain from before the foundations of the world,” because this was the firm resolve and bent of His entire being, before ever the earth was. He had vowed in His soul that He would restore the banishment of the fall, and bridge the distance between man and God. When God would not have sacrifice and offering at man’s hand, then Jesus said, “Lo, I come.” He says of Himself, “The Lord God will help Me;

therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set My face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.” His heart was determined and resolved, for so the expression means, when the text says, “He engaged His heart.”

But why this readiness, why this eagerness? Love is the one reply. His heart was occupied with love to God and love to man, and He could not rest till He had restored the broken concord between these divided ones. With all the forcefulness of His divine nature, and with all the energy of His perfect humanity, He was resolved to bring men back to God. While He was yet a boy He felt bound to be about His Father’s business. When He first appeared among the multitude it was by submission to the Father’s ordinance to fulfill all righteousness. He could not hold His peace or take rest, because His mission was urgent and His heart was in it. Many a time He set aside a crown to bear a cross. All the kingdoms of this world could not bribe Him from His sacred purpose, though displayed before Him by the arch-tempter in a sudden blaze of brightness.

If any endeavored to dissuade Him from His purpose, even though they did it out of love, He saw the evil spirit who was using them as his instruments, and with indignation He broke the snare. Even though it was the beloved Peter, He looked on him as the devil’s advocate, and said, “Get you behind Me, Satan.” How full of meaning is that sigh, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it is accomplished!” He was shut up like a man in a narrow prison, and His only enlargement was to be by anguish and death. He was straitened till He could give Himself up as a sacrifice, and so open a door for us to our God. The insatiable desire of our Lord’s vehement spirit was the finishing of the work which the Father had given Him to do. It was His meat and His drink to accomplish the purpose of love. “Who is this?” “Who is this?” The more I turn it over and think of it the more I am astonished

that so condescending, gracious, and glorious a work should engage the heart of the Lord of all. We had not loved Him, but He loved us. We were His enemies, but what a friend was He! Our hearts were set on wandering, but His heart was engaged to bring us near to God. Let us each pause here and admire as we say, “He loved me and gave Himself for me.” Who is this that thus has spent His love upon so poor a being!

Having thus determined that He would approach unto God on our behalf He took all the consequences. A correct reading of the passage would be, “Who is this that has pledged His heart or His life to approach unto Me, says the Lord?” If you take the meaning of the word “heart” to be “life,” since the heart is the source of life, then we read that our Lord pledged His life, put His life in surety that He would approach unto God, the Judge of all, and bring us near to Him. When He came as the representative of sinful men—then vengeance with its sword must smite Him, and He was willing to be smitten. Voluntarily He gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. He did not hide His face from shame and spitting. He must die, if He draws near to God, for sinful men, for such is the penalty due, but He willingly laid down His life of Himself, and bowing His head He gave up the ghost. He must be deserted of God, and He even submits to that, till He cries, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” He might have drawn back from His undertaking if He would, but He never thought of drawing back.

With desire He desired to eat that Passover. In order to die He broke off in the middle of a discourse, saying, “Arise, let us go therefore.” His motto was, “The cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?” He saved others, but Himself He could not save, because love held Him bound in her chains. How intensely ought we to love Jesus, since He thus reckoned nothing too hard or heavy, that He might appear in the

presence of God for us and make a way to God for poor sinners such as we are. He even delighted in suffering and dishonor for this end. “For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame.” He made pledge, not merely of hand or eye, but of His heart and life. He came with His life in His hands before Jehovah’s face, and gave up that life that He might remove from us the death penalty due to justice, and so reconcile us to the Lord of all. Tune your harps, you angels! Make this Sabbath on which we think of this sublime mystery a special festival of song. Oh, sing unto the Lord, you redeemed ones who see His face! You are before the throne of glory because He stood before the throne of vengeance, and made it possible for your robes to be washed white as snow. As for you, you redeemed with blood that are still below, bring forth your loudest notes, and praise Him who has once and for all cleared the way and opened an avenue of grace for you. Who is this wonderful Savior? Who shall declare the generation of Him who pledged His life that He might draw near to God for us, and endured all the consequences to the bitter end?

And now today, beloved, Jesus Christ rejoices to think that He has approached unto God on our behalf, and made eternal amity between God and man. Let us rejoice with Him. Let us become happy in fellowship with our God—

“’Tis finished all; the veil is rent,
The welcome sure, the access free;
Now then, we leave our banishment,
O Father, to return to Thee!”

This is the joy of Christ’s heart forever. He welcomes our return to God. He is glad when our communion is hearty and

continuous. By His Holy Spirit He draws us near. Blessed be His name.

III. Let me try, and may the Spirit of God help me, TO AWAKEN YOUR INTEREST IN THE SWEET RESULTS OF JESUS CHRIST'S HAVING APPROACHED GOD FOR US.

The first result is found in the chapter. Read that 22nd verse. Read it with your own eyes, and wonder that it should be put there. "Who is this that engaged His heart to approach unto Me? says the Lord. And you shall be My people, and I will be your God." That is, because our royal High Priest approached unto God for us, therefore we who were called outcasts; we whose wound was incurable and grievous; we that were utterly ruined and undone, we, believing in this Jesus, shall in Him become the people of God. Let me speak plainly with you, beloved brethren, how many of you have realized this? It is all idle for me to talk about Christ making the way unless you run in the way. Are you the Lord's people? Many of you humbly rejoice in this high honor, but there may be a few here who are of another mind, you care nothing for having the Lord to be your God.

Possibly you sneer, and call it *hypocritical*. Yes, but if you knew the truth you would not do so. When we hear you speaking contemptuously of being God's people, all we can say is, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Will you mind thinking just for half a minute? Will you try to think justly and rightly? Must it not be good and right that the creature should love the Creator? Must it not be a wise thing that the children whom God has formed should love their heavenly Father and be on good terms with Him? Is it not likely that it would be a happy thing for you if you were one of God's people? You can never rest till you are. But you ask, "How can I be?" Why, it all follows upon what I have been talking of. Jesus Christ went to the Father for us, that we might approach

unto the Father in Him and through Him, that we might become the Lord's own people, and that the Lord might become our God. I tell you I would sooner say, "This God is my God," than anything else that I can imagine. To say, "This kingdom is my kingdom," or "This whole world is mine," were a miserable business compared with saying, "My Beloved is mine and I am His." You would not think I exaggerated if you tried it.

I invite you to an honest, practical test. See if there is not joy in the salvation of God. Religion is with some people a sort of dreamy thing on Sundays; you sit in your pews and bear with us long-winded talkers about things which you do not care for. Oh, but if you did value and enjoy them! If you could but taste and handle them you would say, "Go on, preacher, go on! You are a poor hand at it, for your themes are so great and wondrous that you cannot reach to them, but, still, go on. Ring that bell again. Open more doors, and let us peep in upon the secret treasures. Bring us more clusters of the grapes of Eshcol, and let us at least pluck a berry here and there if we cannot carry away a whole cluster, and so fill our mouths with the inexpressible delight of being God's people, and having Jehovah to be our God." This bliss comes to those of us who rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh, because Jesus said, "I will wait upon the Lord that hides His face from the house of Jacob." The face of the Lord is no longer hidden from us, but we have access with confidence into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

I seem to see in my spirit that old legend of Rome worked out in very deed. So says the story, in the Roman Forum there gaped a vast chasm which threatened the destruction of the Forum, if not of Rome. The wise men declared that the gulf would never close unless the most precious thing in Rome was

cast into it. See how it yawns and cracks every moment more horribly. Hasten to bring this noblest thing! For love of Rome sacrifice your best! But what, or who is this? Where is a treasure meet for sacrifice? Then Curtius, a belted knight, mounted his charger, and rightly judging that valor and love of country were the noblest treasures of Rome, he leaped into the gulf. The yawning earth closed upon a great-hearted Roman, for her hunger was appeased. Perhaps it is but an idle tale, but what I have declared is truth. There gaped between God and man a dread abyss, deep as hell, wide as eternity, and only the best thing that heaven contained could fill it. That best thing was He, the peerless Son of God, the matchless, perfect man and He came, laying aside His glory, making Himself of no reputation, and He sprang into the gulf, which then and there closed, once and for all —

“Down from the shining seats above
With joyful haste He fled,
Entered the grave in mortal flesh,
And dwelt among the dead.

Oh, for this love let rocks and hills
Their lasting silence break,
And all harmonious human tongues
The Savior's praises speak.”

One great result of Christ's having died, is to leave us a way of access, which is freely opened to every poor, penitent sinner. Come. Are you using that way of access? Do you use it every day? Having used it, and thus having drawn near to God, do you dwell near to God? Do you abide in God? Is God the main thought of your life, the chief delight and object of your being? If it is not so, I earnestly invite you by the Spirit's help to make

it so. You must engage your heart to come to God in Christ. There is no coming to God without sincere resolve and eager desire. Are you engaged to such an end? Alas, it may be you are drawn elsewhere. Are you engaged? Alas, some are engaged to Madame Bubble, some are engaged to Belial, some are engaged to self, some are engaged to Mammon, some seem engaged to the very devil of the pit. Be wise, and break these unlawful engagements. Let your covenant with death be broken, and your league with hell be annulled. Though you are weary of my words, yet I would stir you up to interest in this all-important matter. Break these deadly bands asunder. God help you, by a sudden energy which He shall give you, to snap your fetters once and for all, and then at once firmly engage your hearts to Christ. Never such loveliness, never such love will you find elsewhere. Come, say now— whatever else I do or do not do, I will do this. I will approach to God by the way that Christ has opened for me. I will arise and go to my Father. I will throw myself at my Father's feet. I must be reconciled. I cannot live an enemy to Him. I must be made a friend—

“I will approach You —
I will force
My way through obstacles to You.”

Jesus goes before me, and I gladly follow. I will not leave the throne till You, O Lord, have said, “I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you.” I shall be greatly happy, I shall be exceedingly glad, if I may induce one spirit to come to God by Jesus Christ. But if the whole of you will come at once, if God's spirit shall now prompt all believers to come, and all unbelievers to become believers, and so to come, what a splendid company of us will

enter into the golden gates, and what joy there will be in heaven over all of us as we approach unto the Most High.

I think I note a seraph, as he takes down his harp, stand in the center of the heavenly choir and suggest to his fellow choristers that their theme should be, “Who is this that has engaged His heart to approach unto the living God?” Hark how ten thousand voices say—“Who is this?” Let us in humble notes lift up our praises. Here is a verse which may serve our turn —

“Who is this that enters glory,
Clearing for His saints a way?
Who shall tell the wondrous story
Who His glorious work display?
Jesus makes our access clear,
To the Father brings us near.”

Thus the question, “Who is this?” admits of a second answer, for now in Christ Jesus all believers with engaged hearts are approaching unto God. Who is this? At first it is Jesus, Son of man and Son of God. And next it is His church with all her heart engaged approaching unto God by Jesus Christ. My hearers, can you join in the song of praise which is now rising from heaven and earth? Angels are waiting till you approach their God. Come, hurry up, and hasten to be blest. At once approach your God by Christ Jesus, and as angels see you coming, their song shall grow yet louder, till it shall excel the noise of many waters, and out-voice the last great thundering. They come! They come! Sinners are coming to God! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Amen.

1674 BROUGHT UP FROM THE PIT – PS. 40:1-3

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, August 13, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

I waited patiently for the Lord;
and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry.
He brought me up also out of a horrible pit,
out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock,
and established my goings.
And He has put a new song in my mouth,
even praise unto our God:
many shall see it, and fear,
and shall trust in the Lord.
— Psalm 40:1-3

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Psalm 40]

THIS PASSAGE HAS BEEN USED with great frequency as the expression of the experience of the people of God, and I think it has been very rightly so used. It is a very accurate picture of the way in which sinners are raised up from despair to hope and salvation, and of the way in which saints are brought out of deep troubles, and made to sing of divine love and power. Yet I am not certain that the first verse could be truthfully uttered by all of us. I question, indeed, whether any of us could thus speak. Could we say — “I waited patiently for the Lord.” Do you think, brethren, that it might rather read — “I waited impatiently for the Lord,” in the case of most of us? All the rest

may stand true, but this would need to be modified. We could hardly speak in our own commendation if we considered our conduct in the matter of patience, for that is, alas, still a scarce virtue upon the face of the earth.

If we read the psalm through we shall see that it was not written to describe the experience of God's people, exclusively. Secondly we may regard it as David's language, but in the first instance a greater than David is here. The first person who uttered these words was the Messiah, and that is quite clear if you read the psalm through, for we fall upon such language as this, "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears have You opened: burnt offering and sin offering have You not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Your will, O My God: yes, Your law is within My heart." We need not say with the Ethiopian, "Of who speaks the prophet, of himself or of some other?" For we are led at once by the plainest indications, to see that he is not speaking of himself, but of our Lord, and if we needed confirmation of this we get it in Hebrews 10, where Paul expressly quotes this passage as referring to the Lord Jesus. To Him, indeed, alone of all men can it with accuracy be applied. So this morning I shall have to show that this text of ours is most fit to be the language of the Lord, our representative and covenant Head. When I have shown this, you will then see how we can use the same expressions, because we are in Him. Each believer becomes a mirror in which is reflected the experience of our Lord, but it would be ill for us to be so taken up with the mere reflection as to forget the express image by which this experience is formed in us.

I shall ask you, then, at this time, to observe our divine Lord when in His greatest trouble. Notice, first, *our Lord's behavior*—"I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined unto Me, and heard My cry." Then consider, secondly, *our Lord's*

deliverance, expressed by the phrase, “He brought Me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay,” and so forth. Then let us think, thirdly, of the *Lord’s reward* for it—“Many shall see, and fear, and trust in the Lord”—that is His great end and objective, and in it He sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied. We shall close, fourthly, by perceiving *the Lord’s likeness* in all His saved ones, for they also are brought up from the pit of destruction, and a new song is put into their mouths. He is not ashamed to call them brethren, since in each one of them His own experience is repeated, though upon a smaller scale.

I. First, let us think of our **LORD’S BEHAVIOUR**. “I waited patiently for the Lord.” Here, we greatly need the teaching of the Holy Spirit, may it be given us abundantly. First, our Lord’s conduct when He was under the smarting rod was that of *waiting*. He waited upon the Lord all His life, and this waiting became more conspicuous in His passion and death. He went down into Gethsemane, and there He prayed earnestly, but with sweet submission, for He said, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” Complete submission was the essential spirit of His prayer. He rose up from prayer all crimson with His bloody sweat and He went to meet His foes, delivering Himself up voluntarily to be led as a sheep to the slaughter. He did not unsheathe the sword as Peter did, much less did He flee, like His disciples, but He waited upon the will of the Most High, enduring all things till the Father should give Him deliverance.

When they took Him before Annas and Caiaphas, and Pilate and Herod, hurrying Him from bar to bar, how patiently He kept silence, though false witnesses appeared against Him. Like a sheep before her shearers He was dumb, submitting Himself without a struggle. In the omnipotence of patience, He held His peace even from good, because it was so written of Him. When they led Him away to crucifixion through the

streets of Jerusalem, He did not even encourage the lamentations of the sympathizing women who surrounded Him, but in His wondrous patience He said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me.” He did not refuse to bear His cross, or to let the cross bear Him. He did not complain of contempt and slander, since these were appointed Him.

When they nailed Him to the tree, and there He hung in the burning sun, tortured, fevered, agonizing, the words that escaped Him were not those of murmuring and complaining, but those of pity, pain, patience, and submission. Till He bowed His head and gave up the ghost, He bowed His whole being to His Father's will, waiting His time and pleasure. He steadily took a long draft of the appointed cup and drained it to the bitter end. His eyes were unto the Lord as the eyes of servants are to the hands of their masters. He waited in service, in hope, in resignation, and in confidence. He knew that God would help Him and deliver Him, He knew that His head would be raised on high above the sons of men, but still He waited for the Father's time, and meanwhile made Himself of no reputation and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and as a servant yielded all His strength to the work which was given Him to do. He was willing in the hour of His passion to be treated as the scum and scorn of all mankind. Nor did He hurry the hour when all the shame and scorn should blossom into glory and honor. He went down in His waiting even to the utmost of self-denial, and truly proved that He came not to do His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him. Never man served and waited like this man.

Our text adds to this word “waited,” the word “patiently.” “I waited *patiently*.” If you would see patience, look not at Job on the dunghill, but look at Jesus on the cross. Job, the most patient of men, was assuredly impatient at the same time, but this blessed Lord of ours gave Himself up completely, and

showed not the slightest sign of complaining. Not a speck of impatience can be detected in the crystal stream of our Lord's submission. His soul was all melted, and it all flowed into the mold of the Father's will, no dross was in or about Him, nothing which refused to melt and to run into the mold. One would have supposed that He would have spoken an angry word to Judas, who betrayed Him. Instead of which He gently asked of him, "Friend, why are you here?" It would not have seemed amazing if He had upbraided the Jews who so falsely accused Him, or the rulers who so unjustly treated Him, but here is the patience of the saintly One, He was perfect master of His own Spirit. His answer to His murderers was the prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." So meek and lowly in heart was He that to men He gave no sharp replies.

His answers were all steeped in gentleness. Take for example His word to the high priest, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you smite Me?" They sat down around the cross and mocked Him, jeered at Him, insulted Him, and made mirth even of His cries and prayers. But He did not utter a single word of rebuke, much less did He leap from the cross to dash His mockers to pieces, and prove by their destruction that He was indeed the mighty Son of God. "I waited patiently," He says. No thought or word or deed of impatience can be charged upon Him. Waiting, He waited and waited still. We are in such a hurry when we are in trouble, we hasten to escape from it at once, every minute seems an hour, and every day an age. "Help me speedily, O my God!" is the natural cry of the child of God under the rod. But our Savior was in no ill haste to get from the chastisement which came upon Him for our sakes, He was at leisure in His woe. So thoroughly was He resolved to do His Father's will that even on the morning of His resurrection He arose with

deliberation, and quit the grave in order, folding His grave clothes and laying the napkin by itself. He steadily persevered in all His work of holiness and sorrow of sacrifice, never accepting deliverance till His work was done. Patiently He endured to have His ear bored to the doorpost, to have His head encircled with thorns, His cheeks disdained with spit, His back furrowed with the lash, His hands and feet nailed to the wood, and His heart pierced with the spear. In His body on the tree, patience was written out in crimson characters.

Now, this was necessary for the completeness of His atonement. No expiation could have been made by an impatient Savior. Only a perfect obedience could satisfy the law, only an unblemished sacrifice could put away our sins. There must not, therefore, be about our Substitute a trace of resistance to the Father's will, nor as a sacrifice must He struggle against the cords, or turn His head away from the sacrificial knife. In truth, His was a willing, patient, doing and suffering of the divine will. "He *gave* His back to the smiters and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: He hid not His face from shame and spitting." "I waited patiently for the Lord," He says, and you know, brethren, how true was the declaration.

But while the Savior thus waited, and waited patiently, we must not forget that He waited *prayerfully*, for the text speaks of a cry which He lifted up, and of God's inclining Himself to it. That patience which does not pray is obstinacy. A soul silent to God is apt to be sullen rather than submissive. A stoical patience hardens itself against grief, and asks no deliverance, but that is not the patience which God loves, it is not the patience of Christ. He used strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death. Let Gethsemane tell of that wrestling which infinitely excelled the wrestling of Jacob, Jabbok is outdone by Kedron. His was a wrestling, not to sweat

alone, but unto sweat of blood. He sweats who works for bread, the staff of life, but He sweats blood who works for life itself.

What prayers those must have been under such a fearful physical, mental, and spiritual agony which were so fervent that they brought an angel from the throne, and yet so submissive that they are the model of resignation. He agonized as earnestly as if He sought His own will, and yet He wholly resigned Himself to the Father, saying, “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Your will, O My God.” Our Lord was always praying, there never was a moment in His life in which He was not in full communion with God, unless we, except, the period when He cried, “Why have You forsaken Me?” He did often go aside to pray a more special prayer, but yet even when He spoke to the people, even when He faced His foes, His soul was still in constant fellowship with His Father. But ah, when He came between the upper and the nether millstones, when this good olive was ground in the olive press and all the oil of His life was extracted from Him, then it was that His strong crying and tears came up before the Lord His God, and He was heard in that He feared.

Now, brothers and sisters, look at your pattern, and see how far short you have come of it. At least, I will remember with regret how far short I have come of it. Have we waited? Have we not been in too great a hurry? Has it not been too much our desire that the Lord might make His will like our will rather than make our will like His? Have you not had a will of your own sometimes, and a strong will too? Have you not been as the bullock unaccustomed to the yoke? Have you not kicked against the pricks? You have not waited, but you have worried. Can we say that we waited patiently? Oh, that patience! Every man thinks he has it until he needs it, but only let his tender point be touched, and you will see how little patience he possesses. It is the fire which tires our supposed resignation,

and under that process much of our palace of patience burns like wood, hay, and stubble. Old crosses fit the shoulder, but let a new cross be laid upon us, and we writhe under it. Suffering is the vocation of a Christian, but most of us come short of our high calling. Our Lord Jesus has joined together reigning and suffering, for we read of “the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.” He was the royal example of patience, but what are we? Remember, again, that Jesus prayed persistently while He waited, “being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly.”

Have we not at times restrained prayer? Have we not pleaded as an excuse for our feeble petitions the very facts which ought to have been a spur to our earnestness? “I felt too ill to pray.” Could you not pray for health with all the more fervency? “I felt too burdened to pray.” Should you not pray for help to bear your burden? Can we ever safely say to ourselves, “I may be excused from supplication now, for my sorrow is great”? Talk not so. Here is your balm and benediction, your comfort and your cordial, here is your strength and succor, your constancy and confidence. Even in the midnight of the soul let us arise and pour out our hearts like water before the Lord. O tried believer, get to your knees and from above the mercy seat the glory of the Lord shall shine forth upon you. Pray even as Jesus did, and as all His saints have done, and so shall you in patience possess your soul. In due time the Lord inclined to the afflicted suppliant, listening to His moaning from the bottom of the pit, of this it is high time for us to speak. Yet let us not leave this first point till we learn from the example of our Lord that patience is seen in waiting as well as in suffering. To bear a great weight for an hour or two is nothing compared with carrying a load for many a day. Patience knows its letters, but waiting reads the page and

praying rehearses it in the ears of God. Let us add to our patience waiting, and to waiting prayer.

II. We come, secondly, to consider our **LORD'S DELIVERANCE**. In due time, when patience had had her perfect work, and prayer had at last prevailed, our suffering Lord was brought up again from the deeps of sorrow. His deliverance is set forth under two images.

First, it is represented as a *bringing up out of a horrible pit*. It is a terribly suggestive metaphor. I have been in the dungeon in Rome in which, according to tradition, Peter and Paul were confined (though, probably, they were never there at all). It was indeed a horrible pit, for originally it had no entrance but a round hole in the rock above, and when that round hole at the top was blocked with a stone, not a ray of light nor a particle of fresh air could possibly enter. The prisoners were let down into the cavern, and they were left there. When once the opening was closed they were cut off from all communication with their fellow men. No being has ever been so cruel to man as man. Man is the worst of monsters to his kind, and his cruel inventions are many. He has not been content to leave his fellows their natural liberty, but he built prisons and dug pits in which to shut up his victims.

At first they would place a man in a dry well merely for custody and confinement, or they would drop him into some hollow cavern in the earth in which corn or treasure had been concealed. But afterwards with greater ingenuity of malice, they covered over the top of these pits so that the prisoners could not be partakers of God's bountiful air, or the merciful light of the sun, or the silver sheen of the moon. Covered all over and shut in, the captives were buried alive. Even in modern times we have seen what they call *oubliettes*, or dungeons in which prisoners were immured, to be forgotten as dead men out of mind, buried so as never to come forth again. Such

unfortunates as were doomed to enter these tombs of living men bade farewell to hope. They were inhabitants of oblivion, dwellers in the land of death-shade, to remain apart from their kind, cut off from memory. These worst of dungeons may illustrate our text—"He brought Me up also out of a horrible pit."

In the original we get the idea of a crash, as when some mailed warrior in the midst of the battle stumbles into a pit, and there he lies bruised and broken, and there is the thought of the fall of waters rushing strangely, furiously, mysteriously. The Hebrew has it, "The pit of noises," or as some renders it, "the pit of destruction." Such was the condition of our dear Redeemer when He was bearing our sin and suffering in our place.

Just notice, first, that our Lord was like a man put into a pit and so made to be *quite alone*. Imagine yourself now confined in one of those caverns, with a big stone rolled over the mouth of it. There would be neither hearing nor answering. Now you will know the dread solemnity of silence. You may speak, but no gentle whisper of sympathy will reach your ears in return. You may cry again and again and make the dungeon's dome echo to your voice, but you are speaking as to brass—no man cares for your soul. You are alone, alone in a fearful solitude. Thus it happened to our Savior. All His disciples forsook Him and fled, and what was infinitely worse, His God forsook Him too. He cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Can any man tell me all that was meant by that infinite lament?

Of course, a prisoner in such a pit as that was *in total darkness*. He could not see the walls which enclosed him, nor as much as his own hand. No beam of sunlight ever wandered into that stagnant air, the captive would have to grope for the pitcher of water and the morsel of bread which a cruel mercy would allot to him. Our Lord was in the dark. Midnight

brooded over His spirit. He said—“Now is My soul troubled.” “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful even unto death.” His was a pit of gloom, the region of the shadow of death, a land of darkness as darkness itself.

When a man is shut up in a pit he is, of course, *full of distress*. If you were, any of you, to go into one of the solitary cells of our own jails, I guarantee you a short sojourn in it would be quite enough. These cells some years ago were thought to be wonderful cures for all sort of evil dispositions in men, but probably they have more often destroyed reason than conquered depravity. Go in, if you dare. Ask the warden to shut the door and leave you in the dark, all alone, that you may try the solitary system for yourself. No, I would not advise you to try it even for five minutes, for you might, even in that short time, inflict such an injury upon your nervous system as you would never recover. I believe that many of the gentler ones here would be quite unable to bear total darkness and solitude even for the shortest time. In the grim gloom the soul is haunted with phantom fears, while horror peoples the place which is empty of human beings. The heart is worried with evil imaginations, and pierced with arrows of distress. Grief takes hold of the spirit and alarm conquers hope.

In our Lord's case, the grief and sorrow which He felt can never be described, nor need it be conceived. It was something tantamount to the miseries of damned souls. The holy Jesus could not feel the exact misery which takes hold on abandoned rebels, but He did suffer what was tantamount to that at the judgment seat of God. He gave a *quid pro quo*, a something which in God's esteem, reckoning the dignity of His mighty person, stood instead of the sinner's eternal suffering. He felt woe upon woe, night blackening night. Do not try to realize His agony, He wills that you should not, for He has trod the winepress alone, and of the people there were none with Him,

as if to show that none could understand His sorrows, and that we can do no more than speak of His “unknown sufferings.”

But I must add to complete the figure that shut up in such a pit there might be a great tumult above, like to the tramping of armed hosts. Or there might be a rush of waters underneath the captive deep in earth's bowels. He could not tell what the noise was, nor from where it came and therefore, he would often be in terrible fear while he sat alone in the thick darkness. Our Lord had His fears, for we read that He was heard in that He feared. Torrents of sin rushed near Him, floods of wrath were heard around Him, and waterfalls of grief fell upon Him. Besides, there was a mystery about this anguish which intensified it—a mystery not to be written or explained. Our Redeemer's spirit was cast down within Him far beyond anything that is common to men. In that horrible pit, that pit of destruction, He lay with none to pity or sustain.

But, oh, change the strain, and sing unto the Lord awhile, as we read the verse, “He brought Me up out of a horrible pit.” The Lord Jesus Christ was lifted up from all sorrow of spirit at that moment when He said so bravely, “It is finished,” and though He died yet was He lifted up from death, as it is written, “You will not leave My soul in hell; neither will You suffer Your Holy One to see corruption.” His Spirit ascended to God, and by and by, when the third day had blushed with morning light, His body rose from the tomb, to ascend in due time to glory. He came up out of the pit of the grave, delivered from all fear of corruption, pain, or defeat. Now His sorrow is ended, and His brow is clear from care. His visage is marred no more. He bears the scars which do but illumine His hands and feet with splendor, but —

“No more the bloody spear,
The cross and nails no more,
For hell itself shakes at His name
And all the heavens adore.”

Sing you unto the Lord, you saints of His, as you behold your Master brought up again from among the sorrowful, the despised, the deserted, and the dead.

A second figure is, however, used here to express our Lord’s grief and deliverance from it—“*Out of the miry clay.*” Travelers tell us that wherever pits are still used as dungeons they are damp, foul, and utterly loathsome, for they are never cleansed, however long the prisoner may have been there, or however great the number of victims shut up within them. You know what the prisons of Europe were in Howard’s days, they were even worse in the East in periods of time further back. The imprisoned wretch often found himself sinking in the mire. He found no rest, no hope of comfort, and when extricated he needed a hand to drag him out of the thick clay. Our blessed Lord and Master found Himself when He was suffering for us, where everything appeared to give way beneath Him. His spirits sank, His friends failed Him, and His heart melted like wax.

Every comfort was taken from Him. His blessed manhood found nothing upon this earth upon which it could stay itself, for He had been made sin for us, made a curse for us, and so every foundation of comfort departed from Him. He was deprived of visible support, and reduced to a sad condition. As a man who has fallen into a slough cannot stir so as to recover himself, so was it with our Redeemer, who says in the Psalms—“I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing.” Some morasses are so destructive that if a man should once fall into them, he might give up his life for lost unless someone came

that way to drag him out. So the Savior did sink in the miry clay of our sin and misery, until the Lord Almighty lifted Him out. The clay of sorrow clung to Him. It held to Him while He was performing the great work of our redemption. But the Lord brought Him up out of it. There is no mire upon His garments now. His feet no longer sink, he is not held by the bands of death, and He slides not into the grave, again. He was dragged down, as it were, by bearing our sin, but that is over and He has ascended on high. He has led captivity captive and received gifts from men. All honor to Him and to His Father who delivered Him.

As we read our text we pursue this story of our Master's deliverance, and we are told that *He was brought up* out of the lowest deeps. Say the words or sing them as you choose—"He brought Me up." God raised up His obedient Son from the depths into which He had descended on our account. He was brought up, like Jonah who went to the bottom of the mountains and yet was landed safely on the shore. He was brought up like Joseph, who rose from a pit to a palace; like David, who was led up from the sheepfold to the kingdom. "The king shall joy in Your strength, O Lord; and in Your salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! His glory is great in Your salvation: honor and majesty have You laid upon Him. For You have made him most blessed forever: You have made Him exceedingly glad with Your countenance."

Then we are told *He was set on a rock*, and oh, the glory of our blessed Lord in this matter, for now He stands on a firm foundation in all that He does for us. Judgment and truth confirm His ways, and the Judge of all the earth approves His doings. Christ has no sandy foundation for His work of mercy or His words of comfort. When He saves, He has a right to save, when He puts away sin, He does it on indisputable grounds, when He helps and delivers His people He does it

according to law, according to the will of the Highest. As Justifier, Preserver, and Perfecter of His people, He stands upon a rock. This day I delight to think of my Lord as settling His church with Himself upon the immutable foundations of the covenant, on the decree of God, on the purpose of the Father, on His own work, and on the promise of God that He would reward Him in that work. Well may we say that His feet are upon a rock, for He is Himself, by another figure, the Rock of Ages, the Rock of our salvation.

And now *the goings of our glorious Christ, are established*. When He goes out to save a sinner, He knows that He can do it, and has a right to do it. When He goes up to His Father's throne to make intercession for sinners His goings are established and the desire of His heart is given Him. When He comes in among His church, or marches forth with His people to the ends of the earth His goings are established. "For the King trusts in the Lord, and through the mercy of the Most High He shall not be moved." He shall surely come a second time without sin unto salvation, for so has the Father decreed. His glorious goings, are as surely established as were those of His labor and suffering. We shall never be without a Savior. We shall never have a fallen or a vanquished Savior, for, His goings are established for continuance, certainty, and victory. Such honor has all His saints, for "the steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord," and again, "None of his steps shall slide."

Best of all, there is a *new song in the mouth of our Well-beloved*. It is grand to think of Jesus singing. Read the 22nd Psalm, and you will find Him doing it, as also in the Hebrews, "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto You." Toward the end of His earthly career you hear Him bursting into song. Was not that a grand occasion just before His passion, when He was going out to die? We read that "after supper they sang a hymn." If we had been bound to die that night, as He was, we should

rather have wept or prayed than sang. Not so our Lord. I do not know what psalm they sang, probably a part of the great Hallel, usually sung after the Passover, which consists of those Psalms at the end of the book which are so full of praise. I believe the Savior Himself pitched the tune and led the strain. Think of Him singing when near His hour of agony! Going to scorn and mockery, singing! Going to the crown of thorns and the scourge, singing! Going to death, even the death of the cross, singing! For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame! But now, what must that new song be which He leads in heaven? “They sang, as it were, a new song before the throne.”

But it is He that leads the heavenly orchestra. How greatly He excels Miriam, the sister of Moses, when she took her timbrel and led forth the women in their dances, saying, “Sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously: the horse and His rider has He thrown into the sea.” This is called, “the song of Moses, the servant of God and of the Lamb,” so I gather that the Lamb’s new song is after the same triumphant fashion, it is the substance of that which Moses’ song foreshadowed. In Christ Jesus the Lord our God has led captivity captive. Let us praise Him on the high sounding cymbals. Sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously. The powers of darkness are destroyed. Sin, death, and hell are drowned in the atoning blood, the depths have covered them, and there is not one of them left. Oh, “sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously.” “Ascribe you greatness unto our God.”

III. Such is the exalted condition of our Lord at this hour. Let us turn and look upon **THE LORD’S REWARD**. The Lord’s reward for having gone down into the horrible pit, and having sunk in the miry clay for us, is this—that “many shall see, and fear, and trust in the Lord. *“Many!”* Not all mankind, but “many” shall look to Jesus and live. Alas! Vast numbers continue in

unbelief, but “many” shall believe and live, and the Lord’s “many” means very many. As I was thinking over my text, I thought, “I hope there will be some at the Tabernacle this morning that belong to the ‘many’ who shall see and fear and trust in the Lord.” “Many *shall*,” for the Lord has promised it. But, Lord, they will not. “But they shall,” says God. Oh, but many refuse. “But they shall,” says God, and He has the key of men’s hearts, and power over their judgments and their wills. “Many shall.” Do you, oh you unbelievers, think that Jesus shall die in vain? Oh, sinners, if you will not have Christ, others will. You may despise Him, but He will be none the less glorious. You may reject His salvation but He shall be none the less mighty to save. He is a King, and you cannot pluck a single jewel from His crown. If you are so foolish as to provoke His iron rod so that He shall break you in pieces with it, yet He will be glorious in the sight of God, and He will save His own. Notwithstanding your hardness of heart, be this known unto you, oh House of Israel, that, “many shall see, and fear, and trust in the Lord.”

What shall the many do? They shall “*see*.” Their eyes shall be opened, and they shall see their Lord in the horrible pit, and in the miry clay, and as they look they shall see that He was there for them. What joy this will create in their spirits! If they do not see the Lord Jesus as their substitute, they shall, at any rate, be made to see the exceedingly sinfulness of sin. If when Jesus only takes imputed sin, and has no sin of His own, yet He must be cast into the horrible pit and sink in the miry clay, then what will become of men who have their own sins about them, provoking the fierce anger of the Lord? If God thus smites His Well-beloved, oh sinner, how will He smite you! Beware, you that forget Him, lest He tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you. By the suffering Surety all covered with His own gore, I do beseech you, provoke not God, for if His Only-

Begotten must suffer so, you must suffer yet more if you first break His law, and next reject His gospel.

“Many shall see.” Do you wonder that it is added “and shall *fear*?” It makes men fear to see a bleeding Christ, and to know that they crucified Him. It makes men fear, however, with a sweet filial fear that is akin to hope, when they see that Jesus died for sinners, the just for the unjust, to bring them to God. Oh, when they see the Lord of love acting as a scapegoat, and bearing their sins away into the wilderness of forgetfulness, they begin to hate their evil ways, and to have a reverent fear of God, for so says the Scripture, “there is forgiveness with You that You may be feared.”

But best of all—and this is the chief point—they come to “*trust* in the Lord.” They build their hope of salvation upon the righteousness of God as manifested in Christ Jesus. Oh, I would to God that some of you would trust Him at once. Beloved friends, are you trying to be saved by your own works? That is a delusion. Are you hoping to be saved by your own feelings? That is a lie. But you can be saved, you shall be saved, if you will trust yourself with that blessed One who was alone in the dark pit of noises for the sake of sinners, and slipped in the miry clay for the ungodly, you shall assuredly be saved from wrath through Him. Trust Him and as surely as He lives, you shall be saved, for He that trusts in Him cannot perish. God’s truthfulness were gone if the believer could be lost. Has He not said, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved”? The throne of God must rock and reel before the cross of Christ shall lose its power to save those that believe.

IV. Fourthly, let us see **THE LORD’S LIKENESS** in His people. This whole passage, as I said in the beginning, has often been used by individual believers as a description of their own deliverance. It is a true picture, because we are made like unto our Head, and all the brethren are partakers of that which the

Head has endured. Do I speak to any of my Master's servants in sore trouble? Dear friends, are you made to wait, though your trial is sharp and severe? Is it so that your prayer has not yet been answered? Then remember the waiter's place was once occupied by the Lord Jesus, for He says, "I waited patiently."

If the Lord keeps you waiting for a certain blessing year after year, do not despair. He will give it at length, if it is truly for your good, for He has said, "no good thing will I withhold from those that walk uprightly." He kept His Son waiting, and He may very well keep you in the same posture, for how long did you delay, and cause the Lord of grace to wait on you! "Blessed are they that wait for Him." I have seen people very uppish when they have called on a public man and have had to wait a little. They feel that they ought not to be kept in the lobby. But suppose some young man said to them, "I am his own son, and yet I have been waiting an hour"? Then they are more patient. So when God keeps you waiting do not be proud and say, "Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?" But remember, "It is good for a man both to hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God." Jesus waited—"waited patiently." Seek to be like Him, and in patience possess your soul. "I cannot see how I am to be delivered." Wait. "Ah, this is such a heavy burden." Wait. "But I am ready to die under this terrible load." Wait! Wait on! Though He tarry, wait for Him; He is worth waiting for. "Wait" is a short word, but it takes a deal of grace to spell out its full meaning, and still more grace to put it in practice. Wait: wait! "Oh, but I have been unfortunate." Wait. "But I have believed a promise, and it has not been fulfilled." Wait, for you wait in blessed company, you may hear Jesus saying, "I waited patiently." Blessed be His name, He is teaching us to do the same by His gracious Spirit.

Next, the Lord may send you, His dear child, a very heavy sorrow. You may fall into the horrible pit and see no light, no

comfort, and no one may be able to cheer you or help you. Some that have a touch of despondency in their nature have been brought so low as almost to despair of life. They have sat in darkness and seen no light, they have felt the walls of their prison and have not discovered a crack or cranny through which escape was possible, they have looked up, and even then they have seen nothing to console them. Ah, well, here is a word I commend to you—the Savior says it, “He brought Me up.” The Lord God can and will bring up His troubled ones. You will have to write in your diary one of these days, “He brought me up.” I was in the dark, I was in the dungeon, but “He brought me up.” I can personally say this with gladsome gratitude, for “He has brought me up,” again and again. My heart is glad as I reflect upon my past deliverances. I have often wondered why I am so often shut up in prison, and bound as with fetters of steel. But I cease to wonder when I think of the many among you who are called to wear the same bonds. This is my portion, that I may be a witness-bearer for my God, and that I may be able to speak to the experiences of God’s tempted people, and tell how graciously the Lord delivers His servants who trust in Him. Faith shall never be shamed or confounded, world without end. God can and will hasten to the rescue of the faithful. I set to my seal also that “He brought me up,” and beloved brothers and sisters in tribulation, He will bring *you* up. Only rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.

“Ah,” you say, “But I do not know how to stand, for I sink as in miry clay, through faintness of heart. I cannot find the slightest foothold for my hope.” No, you are sinking in the miry clay like your Master, but in answer to prayer the Lord will bring you up out of your hopeless state, and He will set your feet upon a rock, and establish your goings, give you joy, peace, and delight. Therefore see and fear, and trust in God, and give glory to His blessed name.

Lastly, do I address any seeking one who finds no rest for the soles of his feet? Dear friend, are you sinking in the deep mire of your guilt? The Lord can pardon you, for “the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin.” Are you shut up by conscience in prison under a just sense of deserved wrath? Jesus will give you immediate rest if you come to Him. Do you feel as if you cannot kneel to pray, for your very knees slip in the mire of doubt? Remember, Jesus makes intercession for the transgressors. Do you seem as if, every time you move, you are burying your hope, and slipping deeper and deeper into ruin? The Lord has plenteous redemption. Do not despair. You cannot deliver yourself, but God can deliver you, you cannot stand of yourself, but God can make you stand. You cannot go to Him nor go abroad among your fellow men with comfort, but the Lord can make you to run in His ways. You shall yet go forth with joy and be led forth with peace, the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Only see Christ, and fear and trust your God, and you too shall sing unto Jehovah your deliverer, and this shall be your song —

“He raised me from a horrid pit,
Where mourning long I lay,
And from my bonds released my feet,
Deep bonds of miry clay.

Firm on a rock He made me stand,
And taught my cheerful tongue
To praise the wonders of His hand
In a new thankful song.”

1675 OUT OF EGYPT – MATT. 2:14-15

A Sermon

Delivered on Sunday Morning, August 20, 1882,

by the

REV. C. H. SPURGEON

At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

When he arose, he took the young child and His mother by night, and departed into Egypt: and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, “Out of Egypt have I called My Son.” — Matthew 2:14-15

“When Israel was a child, then I loved Him, and called My Son out of Egypt.” — Hosea 11:1

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Hosea 11; Matthew 2:1-15]

EGYPT OCCUPIES a very singular position towards Israel. It was often the shelter of the seed of Abraham. Abraham himself went there when there was a famine in the land of his sojourn. To Egypt, Joseph was taken that he might escape from the death intended for him by his envious brothers, and become the stepfather of the house of Israel. Into Egypt, as we all right well know, went the whole family of Jacob, and there they sojourned in a strange land. There Moses acquired the learning which was so useful to him. It was out of the spoils of Egypt that the furniture of the Tabernacle was made, as if to show that God intended to take out of heathen hands an offering to His own glory, just as afterwards the timber of the Temple was hewn by Hiram the Phoenician, that the Gentiles

might have a share in building the Temple, in token that they would one day be made fellow heirs with Israel. But while Egypt was for a while the shelter of the house of Israel, it became afterwards the house of bondage and a country fraught with danger to the very existence of the elect nation.

There was a very useful purpose to be served by their going down into Egypt for awhile, that they might be consolidated into a nation, and might acquire many useful arts which they could not have learned while they were wandering about in Palestine. The lesson was valuable, but it was learned in much misery. They had to smart beneath the lash, and faint beneath their labor, the iron bondage entered into Israel's soul, so that an exceedingly great and bitter cry went up to heaven. Yet, when the heaviest burdens were laid on their shoulders, the day of liberty was dawning. When the tale of bricks was doubled, Moses was born. When man had come to his extremity of persecution, then God took His opportunity of salvation and led His Israel out of Egypt in the teeth of their tyrant master. It had been at first a Goshen to them, a place of great abundance in the Delta of the Nile, but afterwards it became a Mizraim to them, for that is the Hebrew word for Egypt, and it means a place of straits and tribulations.

The point that is meant to be brought forward by the prophet is that they were called out of Egypt, for it was not possible for them to mingle with the sons of Ham and lose their separate existence. They were on the banks of the Nile, and at first dwelt there in much comfort, but this seductive ease was not allowed to hold them, full soon they were heavily oppressed, and their existence was threatened. Yet both from the comfort of Egypt and from the captivity of Egypt they were called, and at the call of God, they came forth. The living seed may go into strange places, but it can never be destroyed. The host of God may walk through fire, but it shall not be burned.

God has made the living seed immortal, and it cannot die, for it is born of God. Out of deadly lands, where every breath is disease, they shall be called by the eternal voice. Those whom God has chosen may be cast far away, but they shall never be cast away. They may dwell among a people like the Egyptians, most superstitious and debased; a nation of who even the heathen Juvenal made sport when he said, “Oh, happy people who grow their gods in their kitchen gardens,” For they worshipped leeks, onions, and all kinds of beasts and fowls, and creeping things, but the children of the Lord cannot be suffered to remain among such a people, for the Lord desires to make of Israel, and of all believers, a people separated unto Himself.

Out of the midst of guilty Egypt the Lord called His people, whom He had formed for Himself, to show forth His praise. The abundance of superstition, though it is like the sea, shall not quench the spark of the divine life in the living family of God. It shall burn on amidst the waves until the God who first enkindled it shall by His own right hand pluck it from among the billows, and set it as a light upon a candlestick that it may give light to all that are in the house. Neither Egypt of old, nor Babylon, nor Rome can destroy the royal seed, out of all dangers the church must emerge the better for her affliction. “Out of Egypt have I called My Son,” is a text worthy to be made a proverb, for it is true all through the history of the chosen seed. They are called out from among the surrounding race of rebels, and when the call comes, none can hold them back. It is easier to restrain the sun from rising than to hold the redeemed of the Lord in perpetual servitude. “The Breaker has gone up before them and their King at the head of them.” Who shall block up their road? God is still calling them out, and until the very last of His elect shall be gathered in, it shall still stand true, “Out of Egypt”—and out of anywhere else that is like Egypt, out of the worst and vilest places, out of the places

where they are held fast in bitter bondage, out of these—“have I called My Son.”

At this time I shall first, call your attention to the text in Hosea according to the sense in which the prophet first uttered it. He speaks of *the natural seed called out from the sheltering world*, for Egypt was a sheltering world to Israel, the natural seed, and they were called out of it by the omnipotent power of God. Secondly, we shall notice *the divine seed called out literally from a sheltering Egypt*, and brought up from it into the land of Judea, that He might be the glory of His people Israel. Thirdly, we shall spend a little time in considering *the chosen seed*, those who are given unto Christ of the Father; these also must come out from the world, whether it is friendly or hostile. The Lord has said to them, “This is not your rest, for it is polluted.” He is saying the same today. It is still true of the spiritual seed as of our Lord Jesus and of the natural seed, “Out of Egypt have I called My Son.” May the Holy Spirit be our teacher while we handle this great subject.

I. Let us think of **THE NATURAL SEED** of Israel, as called out of Egypt, for with them this wonderful text began to be expounded. It is well worth considering, for this constituted one of the loftiest lyrics of Hebrew poetry. The deliverance of the people of God out of Egypt, “with a high hand and with an outstretched arm,” is a song which the nation never wearied of singing, and which we ought never to weary of singing either, for at the close of all things we and all the redeemed spirits shall sing the song of Moses, the servant of God and of the Lamb. The great redemption of the Exodus shall always be so eminent a type of the greater redemption upon the cross that the two may be blended together, and words that were sung concerning the first deliverance may be readily enough used as expressions of our joy in our salvation from death and hell —

“From Egypt lately come,
Where death and darkness reign,
Seek our new, our better home,
Where we our rest shall gain.
Hallelujah! We are on our way to God.”

While speaking upon this natural seed I want you to notice, first, that if they are to be called out of Egypt, *they must first go down into Egypt*. They cannot come out of it if they have not first gone into it. I do not know of anything that could have tempted them down into Egypt, for it had nothing to offer which was better than Canaan, but the fathers of the tribes were driven there by a famine which troubled the whole world. The Lord sent a man before them, even Joseph, who laid up in store food for the seven years of famine, and Israel went down into Egypt that they might not die, but might be cherished by Joseph, who had become lord of the land.

The Lord may, in order to prevent His people falling into a worse evil, permit them to go into that which seems hopeful, but ultimately turns out to be a great trial to them. Suffering is infinitely preferable to sinning. The Lord may therefore send us sorrow to keep us from iniquity. Dear friend, the Lord who reads your heart may know that it is absolutely necessary for you to be tried, and so spiritually to go down into Egypt. He may send a famine to drive you there. He may place you under great tribulations, and so He may bring you down both mentally and spiritually into a sad condition, where you shall sigh and cry by reason of bondage. Do not look upon this as a strange thing, for all God's gold must pass through the fire. It is one of the marks of God's elect that they are afflicted. The Lord Jesus says, “As many as I love I rebuke and chasten.” Depend upon it that if you are one of the true seed you must go down into Egypt. The Lord said to Abraham, “Know of a

surety that your seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs.” The shield of the chosen bears the emblem of a smoking furnace and a burning lamp.

Even if the world shelters you, it will sooner or later become to you the house of bondage, yet into that house of bondage you must go, for there is a great educational process going on in affliction to prepare us for the land which flows with milk and honey. Egypt is one of the early lessons. It is strangely early with some. Their religious life begins with a cloudy morning and threat of storm. This will work for them lasting good, “It is good for a man, that he bear the yoke in his youth.” Therefore we have, “When Israel was a child, then I loved Him and called My Son out of Egypt.” The earliest days of Israel were in Egypt, the nation in its infancy was called from there. While the divine life has not yet attained to maturity, we meet with straits and troubles, and have to go down into Egypt and feel the weight of the yoke upon our shoulders. This is one of God’s ways of preparing us for freedom, for he that has never tasted of the bitterness of bondage will never be able to appreciate the sweets of the liberty with which Christ makes men free. So Israel must first go down into Egypt. He descends that he may rise to greater heights.

Note, next, that *it was while in Egypt, and at the worst time of their bondage in Egypt, that they received the first notification that the nation was to be called the son of God.* Israel is not called a son until Moses comes to Pharaoh and says, “Israel is My son, even My first-born: and I say unto you, Let My son go, that He may serve Me.” God had been with Abraham, and called him His friend, but I do not perceive that He called him His son, or that Abraham addressed the Lord as, “Our Father which are in heaven.” Neither do I find similar sweet words flowing from the lips of Isaac or of Jacob, but when Israel was in bondage then it was that the Lord revealed Israel’s adoption, and openly

declared, "Israel is My son, even My first-born." He scourges every son whom He receives, and He receives them even while the scourge is sorely bruising them.

They were a poor down-trodden nation—a nation of slaves begrimed with brick-earth, and bleeding beneath the lash of their taskmasters! The Egyptians must have utterly despised a people who yielded so readily to all their exactions. They looked upon them as a herd of slaves, who had not the spirit to rebel, whatever cruelties they might endure. But now it is, while they are lying among the pots, and their faces are stained with tears, that the Lord openly before proud Pharaoh owns the nation as His son, saying, "Israel is My son, even My first-born." I think I see Pharaoh's grim, sardonic smile as he seems to say, "Those slaves, those wretched brick-makers, whom the lowest of my people despise—if these are Jehovah's first-born, what care I for Him or them?" Learn therefore, dear brothers and sisters, that God is not ashamed of His children when they are in their worst estate.

We are told concerning our Lord Jesus, "For which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren." Yes, and not when they put on their beautiful array, and when the jewels are in their ears, and when they are led forth with music and dancing, and when they shout over Egyptian chivalry drowned in the Red Sea, will they be more the Lord's children than they are in the house of bondage. The Lord God speaks of their adoption for the first time when they are still under the oppressor, and when it seems impossible that they can be rescued. The Lord speaks very plainly to the haughty Pharaoh, "Let My son go that He may serve Me; and if you refuse to let Him go, behold I will slay your son, even your first-born." Oh, but is it not a blessed thing to go down into the Egypt of tribulation if there for the first time we learn our adoption of the Lord? Is it not a sweet thing even to be under the heaviest bondage if you are

by such means made to understand better than you ever did before what it is to be a son and an heir, a joint-heir with Jesus Christ? The first-born of every creature is He, and we are the church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven. The heritage of the first-born belongs to Jesus and to us in Him, and we often know this best when our heart is broken because of sin, and when our troubles are overwhelming our spirit. “Fear not,” says He, “I will help you.” “Fear not, you worm Jacob, and you men of Israel; I will help you, says the Lord and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.” Yes, it was in Egyptian bondage that they received the first witness of the Spirit that they were as a people the sons of God.

When it became clear that they were really the sons of God, then *they suffered persecution* for it. A place which, as I have said, was at first their shelter, now became the iron furnace of oppression. Their hard labors are doubled, their male children were ordered to be cast into the river, and edicts of the most intolerable kind were fulminated against them. Now, brethren, Satan soon knows the man, that God has acknowledged to be His son, and he seeks to slay him even as Herod sought to kill Jesus. When the man-child was born, the Dragon knew who that man-child was, and sought to destroy Him, and vomited forth floods to sweep Him away, until we read that the earth helped the woman, and there were given to her wings of a great eagle that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished from the face of the serpent. No sooner is the child of God really acknowledged to be such, than at once the seed of the serpent will hiss about him, and if they can, will cast their venom upon him. At any rate, they will bite at his heel, till God has taught him in the name of Jesus to break the serpent’s head. Rest assured that this is another mark of the election of grace. All that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution. In Ishmael’s case, it was seen that he that is

born after the flesh persecutes him that is born after the Spirit, and so it is now. You cannot expect to pass through this Vanity Fair without exciting the jeers and sneers of the ungodly, for the Lord's inheritance is unto him as a speckled bird, the birds round about her are against her. Every David has his Saul, every Nehemiah his Sanballat, and every Mordecai his Haman.

But now comes the crown of the text, that is, "I have called My son out of Egypt," and *out of Egypt Israel must come*. For Egypt was not Israel's portion, it was "a land that was not theirs." My brethren, we are not citizens of "the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified," and the best thing in this present evil world is not your portion or mine. Friendly Egypt, sheltering Egypt, was not Israel's inheritance. He gave them no portion even in the land of Goshen by a covenant of salt. They might tarry there for a while, but out of it they must come, as it is written, "You have brought a vine out of Egypt." The best side of the world when it seems warmest and most tender to us is not the place where we may lie down with comfort; the bosom of our God—that is the true shelter of His people, and there we must find rest. If we are dwelling in the world, and are tempted to be of the world, and to take up with the riches of Egypt, we must by grace be taught to cast all this behind our back, for we have not our portion in this life, neither can we have our inheritance until we enter upon the life that is to come. Jacob said on his death-bed, "Bury me not, I pray you, in Egypt." And Joseph gave commandment concerning his bones that they should not remain in Pharaoh's land. Even so the saints of God are weary of the world's dominions; they tremble like a bird out of Egypt.

Not in Egypt would God reveal Himself to His people. What says He? "Come you out from among them: be you separate and I will be a Father unto you, and you shall be My sons and daughters." When He called Israel His son, it is in

connection with this coming out. “Out of Egypt have I called My son.” And you and I must be fetched out from the world and all its associations, and truly severed from it, if we are ever to come to know the Lord our God. In Egypt God was not known, but “in Judah is God known: His name is great in Israel.” His people must not permanently reside in a strange country. The land of tombs was no fit home for a living people whose God was the living God. Therefore it is written, “Out of Egypt have I called My son” and the heathen knew it, for they said one to another, “Behold, there is a people come out of Egypt.”

There were many difficulties in connection with this calling of Israel out of Egypt. Perhaps one of the chief obstacles was their own wish to stay there, for strange as it may seem, though it was a house of bondage to them, they did not wish to stir from it at first. Their spirit was broken by their sore bondage, so that they did not receive Moses and Aaron as they ought to have done, but they even chided them. Ah, brethren, the chief work of God with us is to make us willing to go out, willing by faith to follow Jesus, willing to count the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. He did make them willing, and they went out at last right joyfully, marching in rank like a trained army, not needing to be driven, but hurrying to escape out of the enemy’s country.

Moreover, the Lord made them *able* to go, as well as willing, for it is very beautiful to think that there were no sick people in the whole nation of Israel at that time of the going out. We read—“There was not one feeble person in all their tribes.” What a splendid thing for a whole nation to have no weaklings! There was no need to carry any in the ambulance, but they all went marching forth with steady foot out of the dominions of Pharaoh. O child of God, has God given you the will to get out of the bondage of the sin and the corruption of this crooked generation? He, that gives you the will, will give you the power.

Perhaps you are crying, “Who shall deliver me? To will is present with me, but how to perform that which I would, I find not.” Rest assured that God the Holy Spirit, who has given you the will, will also give you the strength, and you shall come marching out of Egypt, having eaten of the Paschal Lamb.

The Lord stunned their enemies, so that they begged them to be gone, and bribed them to make haste. With blow upon blow He smote the Egyptians, till on that dreadful night, when shrieks of pain went up from every house in Egypt, the Egyptians hastened them to go. “We are all dead men,” they said, “unless you go,” and even their taskmasters urged them to immediate flight. Our God knows how to make even the wicked men of the world cast out the Christian, they cannot endure him when once his adoption is made known. They grow tired of his melancholy presence, tired of his convictions of sin, and of that gloomy face which he carries about with him, and they say, “Go out; go out, we cannot endure you.” They perceive something in him which is foreign to themselves, and so they thrust him out. Egypt was glad when they departed, and so even the world itself seems glad to be rid of the Lord’s elect when God’s time is come to set a difference between Israel and Egypt.

The spiritual meaning of all this is, that from under the power of sin, of Satan, and of the world, God will certainly call His own redeemed. They shall not abide in the land of Egypt. Sin shall not be pleasant to them. They shall not continue under Satan’s power, but they shall break his yoke from off their neck. The Lord will help them, and strengthen them, so that they shall clean escape from their former slavery. With a high hand and an outstretched arm He brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, and with that same high hand and outstretched arm He will save His own elect, whom He has loved from before the foundations of the world, and whom He has purchased

with His most precious blood. They, too, shall sing as Israel did, “Sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously,” in the day when God shall deliver them. So far we have spoken of the natural seed.

II. Now we turn with pleasure to **THE DIVINE SEED**, the man Christ Jesus. He had to be called out by an angel from the sheltering Egypt into which Joseph and His mother had fled with Him. I dare say when you have read that passage in Hosea, you have said, “I cannot see that it has anything to do with Christ.” The passage in Hosea is evidently about Israel, for God is speaking of Israel both before and after the verse. But look, the natural seed of Israel is the shell of the egg of which the divine seed is the life. God calls Israel His son. What for; because within that nation lay that seed, which afterwards was known as the Well-beloved, the Son of the Highest. They were the shell and therefore to be preserved for the sake of the Blessed One who, according to the flesh, lay within the race. I do not think the Lord would have cared about the Jews more than any other nation, if it had not been that in due time He was to be born of them, even He in whom is His delight, that choice one of the Father, the Son whom He loves.

So when He brought His son out of Egypt, it means first, that He rescued the external, nominal, outward sonship. But the core, the living core within, is this Son, this true Son of whom the Lord said, putting all others aside, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” And the passage, if I had time to show you, could not be limited to Israel, for if it had been, it would lose much of its accuracy. Why, do you think, the passage was made so obscure, for it is confessedly obscure, and anyone reading it without the spiritual teaching which Matthew received would never have perceived that Christ was going down into Egypt to fulfill that word. I take it, the reason of the obscurity was this—that its fulfillment might be of the

Lord alone. Suppose His father and mother had known these prophecies, and had purposely set themselves to fulfill them, there would have existed, a kind of collusion, which would have beclouded the wonderful wisdom of God in bearing testimony to His Son. Mary and Joseph may have known of this prophecy, but I greatly question whether they perceived that it referred to their son at all, or to the Son of the Highest, but now they must do the very thing that God says shall be done, without knowing that they are fulfilling Scripture.

One of the worst things you and I can ever attempt is to try and fulfill a prophecy. Good mistress Rebecca wanted to fulfill a prophecy, and what a mess she made of it! She endeavored to make her second son the heir, and in the attempt she brought upon him and herself a world of sorrow. Had she not better have let the prophecy alone? Surely, if a prophecy is made of God, God will see that it comes to pass. If it is a Chaldaic prophecy, a prophecy of soothsayers and magi, no doubt they will try to make their own oracle true, but the Lord, who sees the end from the beginning and ordains all things, can speak positively of the future. If any of you set up for prophets, beware of prophesying till you know that you can make it good. God does not need such petty provision. He needs no help from us. His word will surely be established. Mary and Joseph did not try to fulfill the prophecy, for they could not have understood it to mean what it meant. It was purposely put in a dark and cloudy form, but still the Lord knew what He was doing, "That it might be fulfilled, which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called My Son."

Remember one thing; that all the words of God in the Old Testament and the New refer to Christ, and what is more, all the works of God have an opened window towards Christ. Yes, I say that in the creation of the world the central thought of

God was His Son Jesus, and He made the world with a view to His death, resurrection, and glorious reign. From every gnat that dances in the summer sunbeam up to the great leviathan in the sea, the whole design of the world works toward the seed in which the earth is blessed. In providence it is just the same, every event, from the fall of a leaf to the rise of a monarch, is linked with the kingdom of Jesus. I have not time to show this, but it is so, and if you choose to think it over, you will clearly perceive it. God set the boundaries of the nations according to the number of the children of Israel, and everything that has happened or ever shall happen in the outside world, all has a look towards the Christ, and that which comes of the Christ.

I love to find Jesus everywhere—not by twisting the Psalms and other Scriptures to make them speak of Christ when they do nothing of the kind, but by seeing Him where He truly is. I would not err as Cocceius did, of whom they said his greatest fault was that he found Christ everywhere, but I would far rather err in his direction than have it said of me, as of another divine of the same period, that I found Christ nowhere. Would it not be better to see Him where He is not than to miss Him where He is? The pattern of the things on earth is in heaven, is in fact, in Jesus, the Son of God. He is the pattern according to which the Tabernacle and the Temple were built. Yes, and the pattern according to which this brave world was made, and worlds which are yet to be revealed. All the treasures of the wisdom of God are hidden in Christ, and in Christ they are made manifest. I do not wonder therefore that this passage in Hosea should point to Him.

It is certain that our blessed Lord is in the highest sense, the Son of God. “Out of Egypt have I called My Son,” Write the word, SON, in capitals—and it must mean Him, it cannot with emphasis mean anyone else. I would rather give up the idea that Hosea even thought of Israel, than think that the Holy

Spirit did not intend that we should see Jesus in those memorable words, “My Son.”

It came to pass that our Lord must find no room in Israel, and so must go down into Egypt. There was no room for the young child in the inn, and now the Edomite, the child-devouring Herod, has risen and there is no room for the new-born King anywhere in Palestine. Alas, how sad a picture of the visible church, where Christ, at times, can find no room! What with contending sects, Pharisees and Sadducees, there would seem to be no more room for Christ in the church today than there used to be. By fear of Herod His parents are made anxious, and by angelic direction they must go down into Egypt, where Herod's warrant would not run. Heathen Egypt will shield while hypocritical Judea will slay. Jesus, like another Joseph, must be carried down into Egypt, that the young child's life may be preserved. Here He has a foretaste of His life trials, and early begins His life of affliction. The King of the Jews flees from His own dominions; the Lord of all must know the heart of a stranger in the land of Egypt. The poet represents His mother as saying —

“Through the desert wild and dreary,
Following tracts explored by few,
Sad at heart, and worn, and weary,
We, our toilsome march, pursue.

Israel's homes lie far behind us,
Yet we pause not to look back,
Lest the keen pursuer find us,
Lest grim murder scent our track.

Eagles o'er our heads are whirling,
Each careering towards her nest;
Even the wolf and fox are stealing
To the covert of their rest.

Every fowl and noxious creature
Finds on earth its lair and bed
But the infant Lord of Nature
Has not where to lay His head.

Yes, my babe, sweet sleep enfolds
You On Your fainting mother's arm;
God in His great love beholds You,
Angels guard Your rest from harm.

Earth and hell in vain beset You,
Kings against Your life conspire;
But our God can ne'er forget You,
Nor His arm that shields You, tire."

Mark well, that if the Lord Jesus Christ had willed it, even though but a babe, He might have blasted Herod as He did another Herod in later days, and He might have made him to be eaten of worms. The glorious Jehovah could have sent a legion of angels, and have driven the Idumaeon dynasty from off the throne, if so it had pleased Him. But no violence was used—a gentler course was chosen. When Jesus stands up to fight, He wars by nonresistance. He says, "My kingdom is not of this world, else would My servants fight." He conquers by flight rather than by fight. He taught His people when persecuted in one city, to flee to another, and He never bid them form bands and battle with their persecutors. That is not according to Christ's law or example. A fighting church is the

devil's church, but a bearing and enduring church—that is Christ's church. His parents fled with Him by night, and took Him down into Egypt, that He might be sheltered there.

Traditions tell us wonderful stories about what happened when Jesus went into Egypt, but as none of them are inspired, I need not waste your time with them. The only one that might look like fact is, that His parents sheltered themselves in a temple where idol gods were arranged, and when the child entered, all the images fell down. Certainly, if not actually true, it is a poetical description of that which happens wherever the holy child puts in an appearance. Every idol god falls before Him. Down he must go, whether it is Dagon, or Baal, or Ashtaroath, or whatever the god may be called. Yes, and he that wears the triple tiara on the seven hills, and calls himself the vicar of God on earth, must come down, and all his empire must sink like a millstone in the flood.

We do not know how the young child and Joseph and Mary lived in Egypt, except that they had received gold from the Magi, and that being a carpenter, not a hedge carpenter, but one skilled in joinery and repairing wheels, Joseph could find plenty of work in Egypt where vast multitudes of Jews were already settled. Whether or not our Lord was carried to Alexandria, we cannot tell. The probability is that He was housed there, for it was the great rendezvous of the nation and the center of their learning. There the Bible had been translated into the Greek tongue by the seventy, and there flourished schools of Jews much more liberal than those in Judea. It is, therefore, not unlikely that the Prince of Peace went to that region where we have most unhappily illustrated Christianity with cuts—not all of wood, nor all innocent of blood. But Jesus could not stay in Egypt. “Out of Egypt have I called My son.” His parents by a brave act of faith went back at the command of the angel, to the Holy Land, Your land, O Immanuel! Jesus

could not stay in Egypt, for He was no Egyptian. He did not come to exercise a ministry among the Egyptians. He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel in His public working. Being called out of Egypt the heavenly vision was not disobeyed. His foster-parent Joseph took Him back, and they settled in Nazareth. Yet remember, He had been in Egypt, and this was a prophecy of blessing to that land, for wherever Jesus goes, the air is sweetened. Every plot of land that His foot has ever trod on shall be His forever. What said God to Jacob? “The land whereon you lie will I give you.” And the same is true to Jacob’s great descendant. Jesus has slept in Egypt, and Egypt is His own. God has given it to Him, and His it shall be, glory be to His blessed name.

III. Let us turn to think of **THE CHOSEN SEED** that shall be brought out of Egypt. Here I would remark that this passage may be taken and should be taken, literally. God has a chosen people who shall assuredly come out of the very Egypt which now exists. It is remarkable that early in the gospel day the truth was gladly received in Egypt. Egypt became the land of saints and divines, and as it had once been the source and home of civilization, so it became an active camp for the soldiers of the cross. Under the successors of Mohammed all this was swept away, and now the Crescent’s baneful beam falls where once the heavenly sun shed out its infinite glory and scattered health among the sons of men. Egypt did turn to God and it will turn again. Let me read you this passage (Isaiah 19), “In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of Hosts; one shall be called the city of destruction. In that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt and a pillar at the border thereof to the Lord. And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they shall cry unto the Lord because of the oppressors, and He shall send

them a savior, and a great one, and He shall deliver them. And the Lord shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yes, they shall vow a vow unto the Lord and perform it. And the Lord shall smite Egypt: He shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even to the Lord, and He shall be entreated of them, and shall heal them. In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.”

So that we feel clear that our God has yet a son to call out of Egypt, and He will call him. There shall be a seed to serve Him even in the midst of the down-trod people who live by the Nile floods, for God has said it. There is one passage to which I should like to refer you, because it is so full of comfort. (Jeremiah 43:12), “And He shall array Himself with the land of Egypt”—think of that—putting it on as Joseph put on his coat of many colors—“As a shepherd puts on his garment; and He shall go forth from thence in peace.” Yet shall Christ wear, as a robe of honor, this land of Egypt, and again shall it be true, “Out of Egypt have I called My son”

Let us learn from this, that out of the strangest and oddest places God will call His son. Certain brethren among us go the lodging houses in Mint Street, Kent Street, and other places. Can any good thing come out of them? Assuredly, it can, for “Out of Egypt have I called My son.” Out of Thieves’ Acre and Ketch’s Warren, saints shall come. Some of you perhaps know of holes and corners in London where a decent person scarcely dares to be seen. Do not pass by these abominable haunts, for

out of such Egypts will the Lord call His sons. The worst field is often the most hopeful. Here is virgin soil, unplowed, untilled. What harvests may be won by willing workers! Oh you brave hands, thrust in the plowshare and break up this neglected soil, for thus says the Lord, “Out of Egypt have I called My son.” Many of you who live in the midst of Israel, and hear the gospel every day, remain disobedient; but some from the lowest and vilest parts of the earth shall yet be called with an effectual calling, and they shall obey, for it is written, “Out of Egypt have I called My son.”

But we will take the text, and conclude with it, in a *spiritual* sense. All men are in Egypt spiritually, but God calls out His own sons. Sin is like Pharaoh, a tyrant that will not yield. He will not let men go, but he shall let them go, for God says, “Out of Egypt have I called My son.” We are in a world which is the destroyer of grace as Pharaoh was the destroyer of Israel’s little ones. You do not think a good thought but what it is laughed out of you. You scarcely catch a word of Scripture, but as soon as you get home you are compelled to forget it. Nevertheless, out of that— “Out of Egypt have I called My son.” You shall yet be delivered. Put you your trust in Jesus Christ, for “to as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God,” and He will call every son of His out of Egypt.

Perhaps you are in the dark, as the Egyptians were during the plague, or as when God turned the dark side of the pillar to Egypt. Ah, but if you are one of His, if you will but trust Jesus, which is the mark of being God’s elect, out of darkness will God call you. Out of thick Egyptian night will He fetch you, and your eyes shall be made glad with the light of the gospel of Christ.

Perhaps you dwell in the midst of superstition, for the Egyptians were horribly given to superstition, but yet out of that will God call His people. I look to see priests converted. I

hope yet to see leaders of the gospel found among men that were once steeped to the throat in superstition. Why not? “Out of Egypt have I called My son.” Where did Luther come from but from the monastery, and he preached the word with thunder and lightning from heaven, and God blessed it to the emancipation of nations. He will bring others of that kind, out of all sorts of ignorance and superstition He will fetch them, to the praise of the glory of His grace. I feel encouraged to pray for those who appear to be hopeless. I feel as if I must cry to God, “Bring them out of Egypt, Lord; the worst, the vilest.” You here, that know what Egypt is and are in it, and know you are in it, oh, believe that the Emancipator has come, the Redeemer has appeared, with an offering of blood He has stood before God, and given Egypt for a ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for you. Oh, that He might win those with power whom He has bought with price, and to Him be glory, world without end. Amen.

1676 DESPAIR DENOUNCED – EZEK. 37:11-13

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, August 27, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“Then He said unto me, ‘Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, “Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.”’

“Therefore prophesy and say unto them, ‘Thus says the LORD God; Behold, O My people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up out of your graves.’” — Ezek. 37:11-13

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Ezek. 37:1-4; John 5:24-29]

I HAVE READ TO YOU the vision of the resurrection of the dry bones. Keep it in your minds that you may understand the text. The figure is a very apt, instructive, and impressive one. It is not, however, a mere figure, it is a parable based upon a remarkable representation of the resurrection of the dead. Although the children of Israel at that time knew little enough concerning the resurrection, yet the Lord, the Holy Spirit, knew all about it, and He used it as a striking picture of the salvation of Israel from that national death which had come upon them. We may with equal accuracy, see in it a vivid representation of the work of grace upon the hearts of all those who are quickened into spiritual life by the power of divine grace. Men

by nature are dead in sin till they hear the voice of God and feel the quickening breath of the Spirit, and are made to live according to that word, “He that believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”

Such a metaphor as this before us drops with teaching as a honeycomb with honey, and it will be our own fault if we are not taught by it. The salvation of men by the grace and power of God is as great a wonder as the general resurrection. The putting of spiritual life into a natural man is a marvel of marvels, and should excite as much wonder as the raising of Lazarus, or of Jairus' daughter, or of the young man at the gates of Nain. Even the rising up of the dead at the last trumpet is not a greater prodigy than the bringing of dead hearts unto the life of God. I shall not, however, detain you by fuller observations upon spiritual resurrection, for I have work to do of another kind, upon which we will spend the bulk of our time and the whole of our energies.

If you thoughtfully consider the text, you will see that it divides itself thus, first, there is a *true word*—“Behold, they say, our bones are dried.” Secondly, there is in it, an ill word which goes beyond the truth—“Our hope is lost.” God is the sinner's hope, and He is not lost, so that the word of despair is not warranted. Thirdly, there is a *gracious word*, a word of mighty love—“Thus says the Lord God, Behold, O My people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up out of your graves.”

I. Let us begin with that solemn confession which I have styled **A TRUE WORD**, “They say our bones are dried.” It matters not how badly men speak of themselves, for what they say of themselves is never worse than the truth. I have never

heard of any sinner who too much depreciated his own righteousness. It is not possible to repent too much, or to have too lowly an estimate of one's deserving or of one's spiritual power. It is a grievous fault when mourners depreciate the power and fullness of God's grace and when despondency casts a doubt upon the possibility of their salvation. But while the depreciation is confined to themselves it is not possible to push it too far, or to exaggerate the evils of an unregenerate condition. The sinner's natural estate is as deplorable as words can describe. He is, in fact, much worse than he thinks he is, even when he is most bowed down under a sense of his guilt and danger. I believe that Luther was quite right when he said that if a man could see his own sin as it really is, he would lose his reason. The condition into which we have fallen by our transgressions is terrible to the last degree.

Observe, first, that *they describe themselves as dead, as dried and as divided*. They speak of themselves as dead, a man does not imagine his bones to be scattered about on the plain while he thinks himself to be alive. These people spoke of their bones, and therefore were conceived they were dead, and so the sinner may without exaggeration, conceive of himself as devoid of spiritual life. He knows not the life of God, for he is dead in trespasses and sins. The apostle speaks of the unregenerate as "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." And again we read, "They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that does good." When men are corrupt, they have gone a stage beyond death, and are receiving the full harvest of sin. As it is written, "He that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." Alas, sinner, you are as one that is dead, only your condition is far worse, for your responsibility and your guilt remain, and your death to righteousness is blameworthy, and will bring punishment upon you.

They were divided, too. These Israelites were scattered abroad in every place, and perhaps you, dear friend, feel that, as Hosea says, your heart is divided and you are found wanting. You cannot get your thoughts together, you cannot concentrate your affections, you are “as when one cuts and cleaves wood upon the earth,” a broken, shivered thing. You cannot rally your mind to confidence in God. Your mind is dead to that which is good, and your heart is divided by a thousand delusive devices.

Perhaps you go further with the figure, and seem to be dried, sapless, useless, and hopeless. A bone is dried when every particle of marrow is gone out of it, when it looks as if it never could have been covered with flesh, or have been part of a living body. Are you lamenting because you seem to be devoid of spiritual hunger, desire, or regret? Do you mourn that you cannot feel, cannot will, cannot repent, cannot love, cannot even fear? Do you groan because you cannot find in yourself anything which is good or looks that way? Do you ever groan out that mournful *miserere* —

“Your saints are comforted, I know,
And love Your house of prayer!
I sometimes go where others go,
But find no comfort there.

I hear, but seem to hear in vain,
Insensible as steel;
If anything is felt, ‘tis only pain
To find I cannot feel.

My best desires are faint and few,
I gladly would strive for more!
But, when I cry, ‘My strength renew,’
Seem weaker than before.”

Truly, you are as a dried bone that has long been bleaching in the sun, out of which all trace of life and feeling and power has departed. This is a very sad description of a man's soul, and yet how many of us have had to subscribe to it for ourselves? It is just what we felt ourselves to be while we were without God and without hope, and yet the Spirit of God was convicting us of our guilt.

Further, these bones *could by no means raise themselves*. We never heard of such a thing as a dead man restoring himself to life, though he is but newly buried, if he is indeed dead, he cannot lift a hand towards his own reviving. These bones were without trace of life. The flesh was gone, devoured by kites and jackals, or rotted and scattered in impalpable powder to the four winds of heaven. How could these carcasses raise themselves? There was no trace of moisture left upon them. They could not give themselves life or motion, it were a fool's hope to look for such a thing. Is that the dreary fact which forces itself upon you? Do not try to forget it. You are discovering the truth. You are already in a lost condition if you have not believed in Jesus Christ. You are not, as some vainly say, in a state of probation, your probation is over, and you are already condemned already because you have not believed on the Son of God. In you there is no spiritual power to stir towards God until His Spirit moves towards you. You will remain cast out in the open valley, unless God's grace shall come to you and unless His Spirit shall put breath into you. For you to be saved will be as much out of the common course of nature as any other miracle, and in it you will have no finger so as to be able to boast, for the Lord alone must save you, or you are lost forever. It is a terrible word for a man to say, but it is the truth, and nothing more than the truth, that he is ruined by sin and "without strength" to repair the damage.

There seemed to be before these bones no prospect but the fire. When they that cleansed the valley came along and found these bones, they would gather them up as offensive objects and cast them into the fire of Tophet to be consumed. This is the only lot that remains unto dry bones, and the same awaits those who are spiritually like they are. Has the Holy Spirit been dealing with any of you till you feel as if there were nothing for you but a certain judgment and fiery indignation? Do you begin to feel in your own conscience the first burning of the fire which never shall be quenched? Ah, whatever may be your gloomy apprehensions, they are none too gloomy. It is a fearful thing to have sinned. It is an awful thing to be called to judgment, and a more terrible thing still, to be under that judgment now, and only to be waiting until that sentence shall be carried out, “Depart, you cursed, into everlasting fire.” Oh, if you cannot sleep at night, and if all enjoyment of earthly comforts seems to be taken away from you, if you begin to sting yourself and make your own life wretched, I shall not wonder at it. It is amazing that a man can live and be quiet, and yet be under the wrath of God. It is a strange thing that he can walk this earth with a smile upon his face while yet his sin is unforgiven, and the sword of the Lord is furbished to work his destruction. Oh, that the sinner knew the jeopardy under which he lives, and the frail barrier that divides him from eternal misery. Does he not know that if his breathing should cease, he is gone to the place where hope is a stranger? I say, if a man mourns and sighs over his terrible future, so that a dreadful sound is in his ears, he only frets reasonably and his fears are based on solemn truth.

Moreover, these people felt that they were *cut off from healing agencies*. They say, “We are cut off for our parts.” That is, each bone is cut off from its fellow, and the whole thing is cut off as to its parts from every hope and comfort. These banished Israelites were cut off from the land of Canaan, cut off from

the Temple, cut off from the priesthood, cut off from the sacrifices, cut off from all hope of approaching God. Many poor souls have been made to feel as if they, too, were cut off. Their Sabbaths are no rest to them, the house of prayer brings no delight, and the preaching of the gospel yields no consolation. They turn to their Bibles, and every page seems to flash a threat, while no gentle shower of mercy drops from above. They fall on their knees, but even prayer seems to be a hollow mockery. They cannot pray as they would. They associate with godly friends, but they gain nothing by their fellowship. Go where they may, they think themselves like a dry bone which meets its fellow dry bone, and is none the nearer to eternal life for such dreary communion. The man is a nuisance to himself, and his very existence is weariness. Ah, you think, perhaps, I am describing an extreme case, but I know that I am picturing some whose eyes are looking upon me at this moment. Happy they who have been delivered from this wretched state, but I had almost said, happy they who are experiencing it, for those who feel their sinfulness are on the road to better things. Brothers and sisters, I hope your extremity will be God's opportunity. When your bones are dried, then will God come in as the resurrection and the life and make these dry bones live. When you appear to be beyond the possibility of mercy, then God, with whom all things are possible, will deal with you in a way of extraordinary grace and cause you to rejoice in His salvation.

It seemed to these poor people as if they were *quite given over*, for when bones are cast out in the field and left to be bleached by the wind and the sun, when nobody gives them burial, but there they lie, the refuse of the charnel house, then they are according to all likelihood, left for destruction. I have heard of persons who have felt in their spirit as if they were forever banished from the light, so that they have cried, "Has

God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? Is the throne of grace closed against the mourner? Will nothing avail? Will not cries and tears bring an answer?" By such downcast ones a whisper has been heard inwardly saying, "There is no mercy for you, you are cast out as reprobate silver." It is the whisper of Satan in the spirit, and it comes with piercing power. The devil often uses the conscience to be the hack on which he rides in his errands of torment. Yet there is a measure of truth in the insinuation. Apart from Christ, we are cast off, apart from Christ, God cannot look upon us except in anger, apart from the atoning blood, our sins protest against the entrance of mercy, and there we lie self-condemned and helpless, abandoned in our own judgment to swift and sure condemnation. Here, then, is language full of misery, and yet sadly true. We are sold under sin by nature, and led captive by the devil, driven by our iniquities to endless misery, from which ignorance and wickedness will not permit us to escape.

II. Now, I turn to that point upon which I desire to struggle with some of you this morning that you may be fetched up by the Spirit's power from the depths of despondency. Here is **AN ILL WORD** in the text, "Our hope is lost." It is a good thing if our false hopes are lost, but true hope is still to be had. Hope is not denied to any man, if he will believe in Jesus, he may yet be saved. They said of old in the Latin, *Dum spiro spero*, while I breathe I hope. And I turn the proverb over and say, *Dum spero spiro*—while I hope, I breathe. To render the sentences rather freely will suit me well, "While I live, I hope, and while I hope, I live." Sinner, your life lies in hope, and while you have hope you have life. To despair is an unwarrantable thing, a thing full of sin, and fraught with mischief, besides being false and unreasonable.

Despair, which is the mind's declaration that there is no hope, is not so much a sickness of the understanding as a sin of the soul. It is a crime against the truth, a high offense against the Lord of love. God is, "the God of hope," and those who are without hope are also without God. No mortal has a just pretense to perish in despair, and if he does so, despair is a form of suicide, a form of willful self-destruction. No man has a right to despair. No man can be right while he is despairing. Let me just speak about this and keep to the point.

Despair is a high insult to God. It casts dishonor upon His chief attributes. In the first place, it is most derogatory to the *truth* of God. If a man says, "I cannot be saved," he contradicts the divine voice, "Look unto Me, and be you saved." God has sent the gospel to men, and it is no other than good news to them, but despair virtually says it is no gospel, it is no good news. God has set up a throne of grace, and promises to meet there with the sinner, but this man claims that there is no throne of grace, for he denies that there can be any grace for him. He refuses to come to the loving Father because he feels sure that He will show no mercy, though He has declared that He will do so. God has given a thousand precious promises, such as this, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." The despairing sinner says he does not believe this, his sin is too scarlet to be made white, and the crimson of his guilt is too ingrained ever to be washed away. Thus he calls God's promises lies, and this is a daring thing to do. "He that believes not God has made Him a liar because he believes not the record that God gave of His Son." It would be an exceedingly heinous offense for me to stand up and say to the Great Physician, "You say, 'I can heal you,' but it is an empty boast, my wound is incurable. Great God, you say, 'I can forgive you,' but it is false, my sins are such as You can never

pass by.” Mark, brethren, the Lord our God is very jealous of His truthfulness. His name is, “God that cannot lie,” and he that dares to say that He will break His promise has done Him sore despite. I need not surely show the infamy of this crime. Let your own hearts condemn the treasonable thought.

He that despairs insults God’s *power*. He does in effect tell the Lord that He pretends to a power which He does not possess. God says, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved,” the man says he will not trust in Christ, for he does not believe that God can save him, he declares that he has gone beyond the bounds of mercy, and so he tells the ever gracious One that He has no power to save him. The Lord loves not that His omnipotence should be thus denied. He is grieved with those who thus limit the Holy One of Israel. They that would restrain His power shut out one of the brightest beams of His glory.

But despair abundantly casts dishonor upon God’s *mercy*. Know you not that His mercy endures forever? “The Lord God merciful and gracious” is one of the ways of His manifestation. Has He not told us that He “delights in mercy”? Yet, if you say, “He will not have mercy upon me, I have out-sinned His grace. I have gone beyond all possibility of forgiveness,” you do as much as lies in your power, spit in the face of the God of love. Have you ever thought of this? Grieve to think that you have ever grieved Him in this fashion. This is the cruellest of sins, it aims its dagger at the heart of the Lord, and it pierces the Redeemer’s hands and feet. The Lord glories in His power to save, and He has plainly declared that He will save all those who confess their sins and put their trust in Him, and do we doubt Him? Dare we so derogate from the glory of the Most High as to say that there remains no hope of grace for us? Shame on such insulting falsehood!

Mark you while it does this, which is bad enough, *despair brings out the devil and crowns him in Christ's stead*. Despair says to Satan, "You are victorious over the mercy of God. You have conquered Christ Himself." Christ says that He is revealed that He may destroy the works of the devil, and you stand up and say, "Here are certain of the devil's works which Jesus cannot destroy, namely, my sin and my sinful inclinations." You wave the flag of the devil in the face of an insulted Savior, and whereas He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him, you in fact tell Him that He has not half the power to save that Satan has to destroy, that Satan can be more successful in destruction than Christ can be effectual in saving. What? Have you again chosen Barabbas and given up Jesus? And is Barabbas in this case the fiend of hell? Will you believe him and not believe God? Can you assert that he, the father of lies, is more worthy of belief than the Christ who died that men might live? Yet despair says as much as this, and says it in the most offensive manner. It prefers Beelzebub to Jesus, for it believes the lie of hell and rejects the word from heaven.

I go a little further, and I say, with a deep feeling of solemnity, that *this heinous sin of despair tramples on the blood of Christ*. Christ has died and shed His blood, and we know that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. We have God's word for it, yet here is a man who says, "It cannot cleanse me from my sin." If we look deep into the essence of actions we shall see that despair despises the atonement and denies its efficacy. We tell the man that there is forgiveness, but he mutters, "It is not for me." We tell him that Jesus Christ has emptied His veins to fill a sin-cleansing fountain, and he answers, "It may be true. He may be able to save all others, but not me." Now, what *you* have a right to say, other people may also say, and if all united with you, it would be tantamount to declaring that the crucifixion is an empty show, that the

Redeemer's atonement is a mere pretense, and that Christ is powerless to save. You reduce the Savior to an impotent pretender, and can this be done with impunity? We preach in vain if this is so. We preach a Savior who cannot save, an atonement which cannot cleanse. Will not God deal with you for this, if you persist in this provocation? Perhaps you think it is very humble of you to talk so, but it is not, it is the height of arrogant impudence. Despair is highly insulting to the dear Redeemer, the glory of whose person is involved in His power to forgive. Remember, Judas who despaired was damned, while the men who crucified Christ were led by Peter's sermon to believe and live. Great sinners who believe shall find mercy, but far less offenders who despair shall find misery. God save you, then, from the Judas sin of despairing, and enable you to believe in Jesus Christ at once.

I must go a step further. *Despair has something in it of sinning against the Holy Spirit*, for the Holy Spirit brings you rich cordials in the promises of God, which will raise your spirits and will restore you from death, and what do you do with them? You take them and dash them against the wall, as if this almighty medicine devised by infinite wisdom, were the deceitful nostrum of a quack, and you could not receive it. It seems to me a great and horrible offense to deny the testimony of the Spirit of God, even of Him who gives to the Holy Scriptures inspiration and certainty, and this you do when you refuse to believe for eternal life. Jesus has put it before you Himself, "Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out." How can you think that He will cast you out? The prophet cries, "Ho, everyone that thirsts, come you to the waters, and he that has no money, come buy wine and milk without money and without price." But Despair answers, "There is no wine and no milk for me," and it denies that grace is to be had without price. In the teeth of Scripture, it declares that there is no pardon, no

mercy, no salvation, thus it denies the witness of the Spirit of God. Oh, take heed, despairing one, lest it be said to you, “You have not given the lie unto men, but unto God.” It is a master sin, this sin of despair. God save you from it if you are in danger of falling into it, or if you are already its prisoner.

When a man gives way to despair, *there comes upon him usually a habit of wrangling against God and His truth*. Oh, see him at it. He is very low, and he comes to see the minister, and the minister’s compassionate soul would comfort him in a moment if it was possible, and therefore he begins to talk to him about the gospel. “But,” says the other, and he introduces a tough question which throws the gospel out of sight. “Oh,” says the minister, “but God hears prayer.” “No, no,” says the man, and he begins quarrelling about prayer and its disagreement with divine decrees, and so forth. The man snarls like a dog, not to keep his bone, but as if he begged to have good food taken away from him. He does not want it. His soul abhors all manner of meat. The minister sets before him a precious promise which he thinks will certainly meet his case, but the perverse mind strives against it, and fights with the promise as if it were his direst enemy. It is not a promise that suits his case at all, there is a word in it which he does not understand, and off he goes on a tangent, beclouding the word, and eclipsing its light, so that he may, if possible, keep himself from being comforted. If God’s people come and try to cheer him with their experience, he fights against their experience tooth and nail. It may be theirs, but it never can be his, there is something particular and peculiar about them why they should have mercy, and there is something equally particular and special about him as to why he should *not* have mercy. He has the key of the door of hope, and locks it on the inside, and then murmurs, “I am shut up and cannot come forth,” whereas he fastens the door himself. Sometimes the despairing one gets into such a nasty, ugly

temper against everything that comes to him from the Bible and from the ministers of God that you begin to think that he must be half mad. So, perhaps he is, but it is not a madness that saves him from responsibility, it is a madness which will be laid to his charge in the great day of account, because it is self-inflicted and willfully persisted in. Oh, what a wrangling, contentious spirit will despair breed, so contrary to receiving the kingdom of heaven as a little child!

Worse than this, *despair makes a man ready for any sin*, for there are many that say, “I can never go to heaven, therefore I will take a good swing here, and get what pleasure I can while it is within reach.” Have I not heard them say, if not in words yet in their actions—“There is no mercy for me, and I may as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb. I will go the whole hog, now I am at it. I will, at least, know the heights and depths of sin, as there is no chance of mercy for me”? Ah, and when Satan takes a man in another temper, he tells him that God will never forgive him, and the poor creature sits down in sullen rebellion, murmurs, thinks hard things of God, wishes he had never been born, and curses the day in which it was said that a man child had seen the light. Then he will be filled with blasphemous thoughts, and it may even come to pass that he rushes into self-destruction and takes a leap into sure perdition. How many have been driven by despair to the knife, and to the noose, or to a watery grave, I cannot tell! But this I know that if Satan can once fill a man’s mind with that, and make him say that God is not true, that the gospel is not true, or at least not true to him, then the enemy glories and cries, “I have him, body and soul. I can do anything with him now.” It was said of the Russian soldiers that they would not go to battle till they were drunk with raki, and certainly some men are champions for the devil when they are drugged by despair of pardon. Captain Past-Hope is a fierce leader of bandits, and will do and dare the

blackest crimes. With all my might I cry to you—above all things shun despair, never say your hope is lost. There is salvation for you yet. God has not cast you away. Oh, do not cast away yourself. What are you doing? The Lord has not given you over to the tormentors, but you are writing your own sentence. You sit down and seem to think that you cannot be happy till you are thoroughly unhappy, and cannot be at rest till you are driven from all peace.

I must still plead with you over this matter. Let me say, further, *despair degrades a man*, degrades him *below the brute beast*, for brutes do not despair. See how an insect will struggle, even when it is cut in halve. Look at a poor bird, what hope it has even in its worst state of yet escaping the fowler's net, still it flutters and does its best to get away. Will you despair where ants and wasps and birds still hope? Have you never seen a dog that had done something wrong, and has been beaten by its master? He tries to lick the hand that has beaten him, and he cannot be happy till he is forgiven. Poor creature, how it looks up for a smile! You have been chastened, you are smarting under it now, but you do not turn to God, nor seek His favor. You think worse of God than your dog thinks of you. Instead of crouching to His feet, as your poor dog does to you, to try and get a gracious word, you growl at the great Lord—"It is of no use for me to be humble: there is no hope." You slander the Almighty, you malign the name of Jesus Christ, you deny the power of the Spirit of God, and so you degrade yourself below the beast that perishes.

Oh this despair—avoid it, I pray you, as you would avoid death itself, for *it will render all means of grace useless to you*. If you will not believe, neither shall you be established. If you fall into despair, the songs of Zion will be sorrowful ditties in your ears, and the preaching of the gospel might as well be the preaching of the law. See how a despairing man shuts his ears, like the

deaf adder that will not hear, charm you ever so wisely, it matters not what the theme may be—if it is infinite mercy, free forgiveness, or everlasting love, yet as long as the soul is despairing, you do but make it the more wretched. The hopeless hearer rejects all consolation, his soul refuses to be comforted, and his despair embitters every morsel he eats and every drop he drinks.

Despair, too, is certainly vain and wicked, because *it has no Scripture whatever to support it*. “Oh,” you say, “but there are many dark Scriptures.” I know there are, but I have not time this morning to take them up one by one, and show that they need not lead any man to despair. But there is one text in the Bible which covers all texts, be they black as they may. I do not mind what the passages of Scripture are, nor what they testify, I am sure they speak the truth, and therefore I know they cannot speak contrary to other parts of divine revelation. Here is the famous text, “Him that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out.” If you come to Christ you cannot be cast out. “Oh, but there is a text—” I do not care about your text, you misunderstand your text, but there is no misunderstanding this one, “Him that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out.”

“Oh, but He will cast me out because—” Stop now, are you going to contradict my Lord Jesus Christ? I cannot have patience with you. You will greatly provoke the Father. “I will in no wise cast out,” that means, for no sort of reason, under no circumstances, under no possible conditions will Christ ever cast out a man that comes to Him. “Oh, but do listen to me.” No, I shall not listen to you, and I wish you would not listen to yourself. You must listen to me as I repeat the Lord’s words—“Him that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out.” You are not to be listened to when you want to make out God to be false. Oh intolerable sin! Jesus says He will not cast you out. Again He cries, “Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden,

and I will give you rest.” Does Christ mean that, or not? Look the Crucified One in the face, look at His wounds, and after having looked at them, say, “I do not believe Him. Christ lies to me!” Will you dare say it? Can you thus defame Him? I tell you, there is nothing within the covers of this Book that ought to lead a man to have any doubt about the infinite mercy of God to him, provided he will just come and trust himself with Christ. There is no God at all if a soul that trusts in Jesus can be cast away, for the essential of Godhead is truth. I am an atheist if the God in whom I have believed casts away those that trust in His Son Jesus. He must be true, if every man is proven a liar. What do you say, then, to that blessed word, “Him that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out”?

Now, listen, you desponding one on the border of desperation! Have you never heard of *the freeness of God’s mercy*? Do you not know that everything that He bestows on sinners is given freely and graciously? The ground of God’s love is God’s love, and nothing in us. When He made His eternal choice, there was a remnant according to the election of grace. It is free grace that chooses for its love, and then loves for its choice. When Christ redeemed us, He did it freely—He freely delivered Himself up for us all. When He pardons sins, He is “exalted on high to give repentance,” and there is nothing freer than a gift— “to give repentance and remission of sins.” I tell you, man, the very spirit of the gospel is this, that there is no worthiness nor desert needed in you in order to your immediate forgiveness and acceptance with God. All you have to do is to admit to the truth that you have sinned and deprived yourself of all claim upon God, and then believe what God declares to you, that He is in Christ Jesus reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Do but accept this word of reconciliation, and you are a saved man as sure as you live.

The moment you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the moment you trust your soul wholly and entirely in those dear hands that were pierced for you, you are a saved man. What right do you have to doubt that God can save you when everything is prepared and given of free grace? I tell you the Lord Jesus has saved many others like you. Are you a harlot? Did He not save the harlot, Rahab? Are you exceedingly wicked? You are not worse than Manasseh, who is said to have cut Isaiah in halves with a saw, and filled the streets of Jerusalem with blood, and yet the Lord saved him. I know that even though you are the worst that has ever lived, still you cannot outrun my Master's wing-footed grace. Paul said he was the chief of sinners, but he obtained mercy to be a pattern to you. Why talk, then, of sullenly lying down in despair? You sigh—ah, if you mind not what you are doing, what you say in your despair will come true through your own making it so. If a man says, "I shall die, I shall die of starvation," and there is a dish before him, but he will not eat, I am afraid that the probabilities are that he will die of starvation, and it will serve him right. If another person cries, "I shall die of thirst," and there is a cup of drink before him and he will not put it to his mouth, I fear that he will die of thirst, and (I come to where I was before) he will die a suicide. He that refuses to eat and therefore dies is as much a suicide as if he stabbed himself in the heart. And he that will not believe God's mercy, and will not accept it in Christ, is a soul-suicide as surely as if he plunged into debauchery, and gave himself up to every lust. Oh that God the Holy Spirit would overcome some of you this morning that have yielded to this great and grievous sin.

III. We shall now close by meditating upon the Lord's promise, which we have styled **A GRACIOUS WORD**. I want you to notice this, poor troubled hearts; I want you to suck in this part of the text even if you forget all the rest. "Thus says the

Lord God, Behold, O My people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves.”

Notice, *God meets us upon our own ground*, and takes us up where we are. They said, “We are as dried bones.” “Yes,” says God, “and I will quicken you.” But the Lord even goes beyond anything which they have felt or said, for they did not say they were buried. No, they were as bones scattered in the open valley, unburied, but the Lord knows they are worse than they think they are, and so He goes further in mercy than they thought they had gone in misery. He says, “I will open your graves,” and that looks as if they were finally laid in the sepulcher. But the Lord adds, “And cause you to come up out of your graves.” Listen, sinner, you have described yourself in a very distressing manner, but God accepts it as true, and deals with you as being such as you describe, or even worse. He regards men not only as dead, but as entombed, in as hopeless a case as corpses pent up in the sepulcher, and forgotten as dead men out of mind. O the mercy of the Lord! There is no boundary to it.

Now, observe how *the word brings comfort by introducing another actor upon the scene*. You are like a dried bone, good for nothing, and able for nothing, but the Lord comes in Himself, and He says, “I will, I will.” Oh, that grand “I will!” “I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves.” “I will.” Now, listen. If God will save you, cannot you be saved? If it is all of grace from top to bottom, cannot you be saved? If there is no merit needed of you, no previous goodness to qualify you, cannot salvation come to you? If Christ died for the ungodly, cannot you have a share in His death, if He came into the world to save sinners, then why not you? If the gospel is not another shape of law requiring something of us, but if it is all free, free, free sovereign grace, why should not you have it as well as me? What should shut you out? If anything could have shut you out

it could have shut me out, for I am just the same as you are by nature, yet I have obtained mercy, and why should not you? Come along and have it. It is freely given to all who seek it trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But remember that God comforts us here by depicting *the completeness of His working*. He does not merely say, “I will open your graves.” That is something, but if they are dead, what is the good of opening the graves? I have known careless ones drop into this place on a Sabbath as dead in sin as dead could be, and buried too. You never would have thought that they would listen to the gospel, but there has crept into their ear some such sweet word as this—“He that believes in Him is not condemned,” and they have said, “Dear me, how sweet it is. How precious that is.” Glory be to God, the grave has begun to open! But they felt they could not get hold of the Savior for themselves, and then the Lord has opened their hand and closed it on the promise, and when they get it they will never give it up, but they have cried, “He loved me, He loved me. I will risk my salvation on it, I will trust Him. I will trust no one else.” Thus the Holy Spirit has fetched them out of the grave though they were dry bones before. He will do the same with you. Oh that you may have grace to believe what God says here.

Lastly, notice *the feeling which is produced by it*. “And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up out of your graves.” Ah, what a feeling a man has that there is a God when God has saved him, when he begins to dance for very joy of heart because he is fully forgiven, then he knows Jehovah is God. When his heart feels restful and full of peace, when he can say, “God is mine, Christ is mine, heaven is mine,” he does not need evidences of the existence of God, or arguments to prove the power of God. He carries a demonstration of the truth within his own heart, and tells of it to others with tearful eyes. “Oh,” he says, “there

is no mistake about it. There is a merciful God, for I have obtained mercy. There is a refuge for sinners, for I have fled to it. There is pardon, for I have obtained it. There is rest, for I enjoy it. There is a heaven, for I begin to hear its bells ringing in my heart.” Then shall you know that God Jehovah is God indeed when He has opened your graves and brought you out. O God, bless this poor word to the troubled ones, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

1677 A GREAT MISTAKE – REV. 3:17-18

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, September 3, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“Because you say, ‘I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;’ and know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness do not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.” — Revelation 3:17-18

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Revelation 3]

THESE WORDS WERE SPOKEN, not to the outside world, but to the church of Laodicea. They relate to persons who were in a church state, who had been baptized on confession of their faith in Christ, and who were thought to be in a fine spiritual condition. They had a singularly high opinion of themselves, and probably considered that of all the seven churches in Asia they were the first in power and influence.

The words before us are as sharp as they are true, and they demand the earnest attention of all professors of our holy faith, for to persons like ourselves they were addressed, and moreover we have the special note of attention — “He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches.” Here the axe is laid to the root, not of the oaks of the forest or the pines of the mountain side, but to the root of the trees of

the vineyard, and the choice trees of the garden of the Lord. By this the Lord showed His love to the true ones in Laodicea, according as He says, “As many as I love I rebuke and chasten.”

While reading the text, I feel forced to cry, “O my threshing, and the corn of my floor!” Truly the flail must first be used upon the heap that is gathered in the garner. It is all in vain to preach to the outside world unless matters be true and right within. The kingdom cannot come nor the Lord’s banner be lifted high if the soldiers of His own army prove false and turn back in the day of battle. The time is come when judgment must begin at the house of God. The word to the slaughter men in Ezekiel was, “Begin at my sanctuary.” The stout heart of the king of Assyria will not be punished till the Lord has performed His whole work upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem.

Behold, the Lord Himself comes to deal with His church, for His fire is Zion, and His furnace is in Jerusalem. “His fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor.” As for them that are without, God will judge them in His own time, but now by His blessed Spirit He speaks to those of us who are within the church, and make profession of His name.

The solemn words which make up our text were also spoken by the Lord Jesus under a most special title, “These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness” (Rev 3:14), as much as to say that, though the Laodicean professors were false, mistaken, and deluded, He who now addressed them by His servant John was true and faithful. He is the Amen, the Verily, Verily of God, He judges not according to the outward appearance, but looks at the heart according to truth. He is “the faithful and true witness,” who does not flatter, nor keep back any of the terrible truth, but speaks out that which He perceives with His eyes of fire, and warns men of their condition with all sincerity.

Instead of crying peace, peace, where there is no peace, and letting them be like Moab at ease from their youth, and settled upon their lees because not emptied from vessel to vessel, He stirs them up that the sediment of their falsehood may be seen and their evil case be made manifest. Oh for grace to hear this word at this time as from the Lord Jesus, and as from Him under the weighty character of a witness faithful and true, speaking as the Amen of God.

It seems to me that my text accounts for the lukewarmness of the Laodiceans. They were lukewarm because they imagined themselves rich when they were poor. Two conditions will help us to escape lukewarmness. The one is to be really rich in grace, for they that have much grace will not be lukewarm. Grace is as a fire in the soul, and he that has much of it, so as to become an advanced Christian, cannot but have a heart boiling with earnestness.

The other way is to have but little grace, but to be painfully aware of it, to be deeply conscious of soul-poverty, to sigh and cry because you are not what you should be. There is no lukewarmness in a strong desire caused by a bitter sense of need. The poor man, poor in spirit, conscious of his imperfections and failures, is never a lukewarm man, but with sighs and cries coming out of a heart that is all on fire with a desire to escape out of such a sad condition, he besieges the throne of God that he may obtain more grace.

These Laodicean people were unhappily in such a state that you could not get at them. They were not so poor that they knew they were poor, and therefore when the poverty-stricken were addressed, they said, "These things are not for us: we are increased in goods." They were blind, but they thought they saw, they were naked, and yet they prided themselves in their princely apparel, and hence it was hard to reach them.

Had they been outwardly worse, had they openly sinned, had they defiled their garments with overt transgression, then the Spirit might have pointed out the blot and convicted them there and then, but what was to be done when the mischief was hidden and internal? Had they been utterly cold and frost-bitten, then He might have thawed them into living warmth, but such was their puffed-up notion of themselves that one could not convince them of sin, or awaken them to any sense of fear, and it seemed likely that after all the Lord must needs spue them out of His mouth as things He could not endure. How far this may be true of any one of us may God in His infinite mercy help us to judge each one for himself. Whether it be true or not, it will not matter as to the usefulness of the discourse if God the Holy Spirit will bless it to our souls in His own way.

Two things in the text call for our notice. The first is *their saying*, “You say, I am rich,” and the second is *Christ’s counsel*, “I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness do not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.”

I. First, let us think of the church in Laodicea and listen to **THEIR SAYING**, it may prevent us from reaching such a height of pride as to speak as they did.

The spirit of self-congratulation expressed itself in a manner *strikingly unanimous*. If all the members did not say so in words, yet, as a whole, they were so self-contented, that the great Amen spoke of them as one person, “Because you say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.” Doubtless a few wept and sighed before God, but they were so inconsiderable that they did not mar the apparent unanimity of the church in its conscious self-respect, nor divide the united

utterance of its open boasting. “You say, I am rich, and increased with goods.”

It would seem that their minister was of the same opinion. Good easy man, he felt that his church was in a splendid state, for the Spirit of God here speaks to the “angel of the church,” who is, no doubt, the minister of the church, and He says to him, “You say, I am rich, and increased with goods.” The self-complacent man had probably gathered together a wealthy congregation, wealthy as compared with the general run of the people of God, who were usually the poorest of the poor. Among these were persons of considerable talent, and as a body they were intellectual and educated. They were so rich in all sorts of endowments that they had “need of nothing.”

Perhaps they hardly needed a minister at all, but were able to become every man his own teacher, and so the timid man was quiet and smooth-tongued for fear they should dispense with him. They might perhaps prefer an open meeting, and then what would become of him? The proverb says, “Like priest, like people,” and under the preacher’s lukewarm addresses the church became lukewarm too. They were so rich in gifts that they did not need to economize, and send out their brethren to preach, one by one. They could afford to let a dozen attempt to do what one could have done a great deal better. They had grown to be such a leading church that other churches looked up to them. They were noted and celebrated all over the country. A member of the church of Laodicea was recognized at once as a remarkable person, so that wherever he went the people would ask him to get up and speak, for coming down from Laodicea, that famous church which had “need of nothing,” surely he could not open his mouth without precious things dropping therefrom, for was he not one of those who were “rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing”?

It was a first-class church, and their prudent and kind minister thought so too, and he took occasion often to say as much. When he spoke to the good people of Philadelphia, at their anniversary meeting, he told them that he hoped they would do their best although they had but a little strength, and could not expect to equal his people who were so much richer and so much better educated. Of course, all churches could not be so strong as Laodicea, it was not likely that everywhere, in those little places, they could gather congregations such as he was proud to look on every Sabbath day in the Tabernacle at Laodicea. It was the general, unanimous feeling, from the minister down to the latest convert, that they were a most wonderful church. They were heartily at one in having a high estimate of themselves, and this helped to keep them together, and stirred them to attempt great things.

This saying of theirs was *exceedingly boastful*, for it divides itself into three parts. They were “rich,” that was their present state, and “increased with goods”—that is they could look back upon years of great prosperity and progress in their past history, and at that present time, if they were not absolutely perfect, they were getting close to the edge of it, for they had “need of nothing,” they did not know of anything which the church lacked, they had the best deacons, the best elders, the best members, always ready to do anything and everything that was proposed to them.

They were rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing. The present was all right, the past was eminently satisfactory, and they had reached a point of all but absolute perfection, for they needed nothing, and when people have need of nothing they can go no further, they have ascended to the highest point, their sun has reached its zenith, their path has been like the path of the just which shines more and more unto the perfect day.

Truly I do not know that they could have opened their mouths any wider. They gave forth about as fine a piece of brag as one is likely to meet with in any ancient record. Here is a church which is a city set on a hill that cannot be hid, is it not a candle that gives light unto all that are in the house? and the candle needs no snuffing, it is burning at its very best. Think of a church which has need of nothing!

Now, notice once more that they were *sincere in this glorying*. When they said it they were not consciously boasting, for the text says, “And you know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” They did not know the truth. They were not hypocrites, when they thus spoke with such self-conscious complacency they really thought it was so, and their minister thought so too. The angel of the church thought that it was an angelic church. There was no insincerity in what they said, in fact, I dare say they said to themselves, “We really speak below what we might say. We are a wonderful people! What we do could hardly be put in print or thoroughly described in words. Our existence is an extraordinary fact.” They did not know the real truth of the matter, but they sincerely believed the flattering tale which their ignorance told them. How readily do we believe a lie when it fosters in us a high opinion of ourselves.

But now see what was their actual state, *they were altogether mistaken*. Their mistake was founded upon ignorance—“You know not.” These intelligent persons, these wealthy persons, these instructed persons did not know themselves, and that is the grossest kind of ignorance. A man may know all about Africa, and the sources of the Nile and the Congo, and yet he may not know what is going on in certain regions of the home department. He is ignorant indeed who does not know his own condition in reference to the most weighty matters.

In our church there are many members who know shamefully little about it, they go in and out among us, and they have not enough concern about the church to make its spiritual state a matter of inquiry. I grieve to say that there are members who, I fear, do not know their own spiritual state, who take it for granted that everything is sound, and say, “No doubt it is all correct.” If their conscience is touched, and they are troubled, they call it unbelief, though it is quite another thing, and may be praised as godly fear. If they are driven into a corner by conviction, they say, “I must not get into this state, I must hope for the best.” They make the best of everything, and shut their eyes to all storm signals.

These Laodicean people were mistaken through ignorance, they had not searched, they had judged the surface of the matter, and never looked below the topsoil, but “the faithful and true witness” makes them see the naked truth. He says, “You know not that you are *wretched*,” that is to say, that they were in a sad and undesirable state, there was nothing about them that could please God, and nothing about them that would have pleased themselves if they had seen things in a true light. “You are wretched.”

Oh, what a change from the distorting glass of self-flattery to the clear mirror of truth! How these men that had need of nothing are shown up when Christ begins to describe them! They seem to need everything. The next word, “*miserable*,” conveys the same idea to us in the English, but the original had better, perhaps, been translated “pitiable.” There was nothing about them to admire, but everything to pity, for everything that seemed to be good was really false, everything that was apparently useful was a mere matter of display. As Jesus Christ looked at Laodicea He said of the church, “Pitiable! Pitiable!” He does not use fine expressions, does He, towards this respectable church, this church with so much wealth and so

much strength? He does not flatter it, for He says of it, first, “Wretched!” and then, “Pitiable!”

Then He goes on to say, “*Poor!*”—poor in the choice things in which they thought they were rich, so much grace they thought they had, but He says they have exceedingly little, and calls them “poor.” Oh, but they had such riches of faith! “No,” He says, “poor!” Oh, but they had such abundance of energy. “No,” He says, “that is only a pretense. They are poor.” He searches the members through, and looks into their hearts, where their precious things are stored up, and He says of them all, “Poor.” There is a sense in which the Lord cries, “Blessed are you poor,” but these were poor in quite another sense. Think of it! Here are a people that were “rich and increased with goods, and had need of nothing,” and yet the verdict of the Savior is, “They are poor!”

And then He goes on to say they are “*blind*.” Blind? Why, they had among them men of the greatest possible discernment, who could see as far into a millstone as any people, they were able to split hairs over points of doctrine, and they had discernment of spirits, so they thought, and could tell who was and who was not sincere. But Jesus Christ says—they have no discernment, they are “blind.” They are not merely shortsighted and weak about the eyes, but altogether blind. And mark you, this is no exaggeration, it is not a hard speech meant to sting them into repentance, but the “Amen, the faithful and true witness” says this calmly and deliberately, and says it about that admirable church of Laodicea concerning which we heard so much when we commenced our discourse, they were poor and blind.

And now He adds that they were “*naked*.” No, surely, not that! Will the Savior say as much of us that? Yes, He says so. They are not dressed in the righteousness of Christ, they are dressed in their own cobwebs of conceit, and therefore they are naked.

They are not resting upon Christ, but relying upon their own strength and wealth, and therefore He says they are “naked.” Yes, these same people who “have need of nothing,” yet have need of a rag with which to cover the shame of their nakedness. They are “naked” before God.

Had a storm suddenly come upon them suddenly they would have found it out. We are such poor creatures that we need to be covered from the sun and from the wind, from the wet and from the drought, from the cold and from the heat. Such is our weakness that we have need of garments against all outward surroundings, and so it was with these Laodiceans, not only for the common decency of their appearance did they need to be robed in the righteousness of Christ, but they needed the most ordinary kind of covering. Though they did not know it, they were open to have been scattered and destroyed as a church had anything happened out of the ordinary way. Oh, this mistake! May the Lord of truth prevent us from making it about ourselves individually, and prevent every church from making such a mistake about itself, and being unanimous in it.

These professors were poor and proud, they were conceited, and therefore they were not likely to be converted. They thought they were making progress, but they were going backward, and because they did not know their true condition it was hard work to help them. You remember the Tay Bridge disaster? There is no doubt whatever that the bridge was not fitted for its position, its ordinary strain was all it could bear, but nobody thought so. Undoubtedly the engineers reckoned it would stand any test to which it might be put, and therefore there was no attention given to it to make it any stronger and to provide against sudden disaster, and consequently when a specially fierce hurricane was out one night it swept it all away.

That is just the picture of many a church and many a man, because he is thought to be so pious, and the church is thought to be so correct and vigorous, therefore no attempt is made for improvement, no special prayer, no cries to heaven, no repentance because of backsliding, and so when there comes an unusual pressure, a night of terrible temptation, the whole fabric falls in ruin. How much better is the condition of the man who feels that he is weak, and therefore goes to the strong for strength! I know a railway bridge at this moment which is showing signs of danger, there are cracks in the brickwork and other mischief, in all probability it would soon have come down if let alone. But it has been noticed by the railway people, and they are as busy as possible trying to repair it and prevent an accident. Is not this much better than a delusive belief that all is safe?

If there is a crack in the substantial part of your religious structure, what a mercy to see it! If the supporting pillars begin to give way, what a blessing to perceive the fact! “Oh,” says one, “you make us feel uneasy.” Yes, it is often a great blessing to be uneasy, and that blessing I pray the Holy Spirit will confer upon you. It is infinitely better to be uneasy and to get right than to be perfectly serene and all the while to be wrong. How many a house is built upon sand, and only waits till the floods shall come and the winds shall beat upon it, and then the whole fair fabric will vanish like a vision of the night, will it not be well to let the tenant know his peril? I think so.

Now I leave this saying, may we never use it ourselves. We have looked underneath the surface, and we have seen the mud which lies at the bottom of what seemed a glassy pool.

II. Now we come to think of OUR LORD’S BLESSED COUNSEL.

“I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white raiment, that you may be clothed, and

that the shame of your nakedness do not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.” I call your attention first to the amazing grace which is here displayed. Ask a schoolmaster what kind of pupil is most objectionable, and I think he will reply that he cannot bear a youth who knows so much already that he will learn nothing correctly.

It is very difficult to deal with the conceited. We can instruct persons who are conscious of ignorance and willing to learn, but those who “have need of nothing,” what can you teach them? They are up to the mark in all points, they are models, they can teach you, and therefore what can you say to them? But here our blessed Lord seems to single out this puffed-up church, though pride is always obnoxious to Him, and He draws near to it and begins to speak to it in love.

He does not use a peremptory tone, but in words of great affection He tenders His advice. He does not say, “I command you,” but “I counsel you.” It is tantamount to that other blessed text, “Come now, and let us reason together.” He puts it so softly, as if He said, “I offer a little kindly advice to you, will you listen to Me? I might speak in harsher tones, I might condemn, I might command, but instead of that I stoop to you, and counsel you. See whether My counsel be not good. Am I not the Wonderful, the Counselor? Is not the wisdom of God in Me? Therefore I am come to speak to you,” says Christ, “and counsel you.”

Note how He begins—“*I counsel you to buy.*” Is not that singular advice indeed? Just now He said that they were “wretched” and “poor.” How can they buy? Surely it suggests to us at once those blessed free grace terms which are only to be met with in the market of divine love, “Yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” The chapmen of Vanity Fair have great difficulty to bring people up to their price, but the Lord Jesus Christ’s difficulty is to bring people

down to His, and so He begins by counseling the poor to come and buy on such terms as this, “Without money and without price.” But why is it called buying? If you have nothing to give, why does He not say, “Come and take it”? No, it is buying, because God would have us make business of it. If any of you have backslidden, and yet dream that you have not declined, if there creeps over you the cold thought that perhaps it is so, then awaken yourselves and make a business of recovery. Come to Christ and buy, not merely act the beggar’s part, but come and act the purchaser’s part, with thoughtfulness, with desire, with judgment. Come now, and give an estimate, do as you would if you were buying a valued article. Estimate the value of Christ and see how richly He is worth having.

In a purchase, there is consent on both sides, the one consents to sell, and the other to receive by purchase, hence the word “buy” is used, for God does not force the gifts of His grace upon any man, but He first teaches him his need of those gifts, and then He bids him come and buy, though it be without price, by exercising thought, making an estimate, having a strong desire, being willing to give anything if he had anything to give, and then taking the blessing with joyful willingness. Christ gives them counsel to buy.

But next, what does He say? “*I counsel you to buy of me.*” Ah, they had been dealing with one another, they had been chaffering and bartering amongst themselves. One brother had brought this talent, another, another, and they had grown rich, as they thought, by a mutual commerce. “Now,” says Christ, “compare yourselves with yourselves no longer, give up seeking of man, and buy of *me*.” It is the very foundation of grace—to be willing to buy of Christ.

Have you a religion which you received of me? It is not worth a pin. Have you in possession a religion which you received of your mother, and father, and Sunday school teacher,

and neighbors, and friends? It is worth nothing. All true grace must be bought of Christ on free grace terms, “I counsel you to buy *of me*.” Do you not know that Jesus is a great monopolist? Nobody else has anything to sell of this kind. The articles He speaks of are entire monopolies in His hands, no one else can sell you the gold tried by fire, or white raiment that you may be clothed, or eye salve that you may see, but the whole stock of grace is vested in the person and offices of Jesus Christ, and therefore He says, “I counsel you to buy *of me*.”

Do you wear a spiritual vesture which you bought elsewhere? Do you use an eye salve which you purchased of another physician? Do you hoard up gold which you procured of some pretended goldsmith? Throw the imaginary boons away, for there is no genuine article in the market except that which comes of the Lord Jesus Christ and of Him alone. “I counsel you to buy *of me*.” Oh, that every Christian here would lay hold upon this advice and say, “I will go and buy of Christ again.” Have I been living on past experience? Have I been living on a profession which I have maintained these last twenty years? I will do so no longer, I will buy of Jesus anew. I will get my manna fresh from heaven, I will seek all my provisions day by day from the person of my blessed Lord and Master, for He counsels me to buy of Him.

Now see the goods which He describes. “*I counsel you to buy of me*”—*what? Everything*. It is true that only three wants of these people are here mentioned, but they are inclusive of all needs. First, the Lord says, “Buy gold.” The man who can buy gold has bought everything, for money answers all things. He who has gold has the medium with which he can procure whatsoever he needs. In Christ there is a fullness of all good things, and in the gold of His grace there is an adaptation to every need. You cannot have a necessity, nor even think of a necessity which is a real one, but the grace of God, which is like

fine gold, will be sure to meet it. Your free will, your unaided efforts, your wisdom, your knowledge, your strength—all this you can get something for in such and such a market, but in God's market there is nothing current but this precious gold, and if you get the gold of grace, then you can get whatsoever your soul needs. "I counsel you," says He "to buy of me gold."

Then next He brings forth raiment rich and rare, perfect coverings such as do really clothe a man so that the shame of his nakedness will never appear. I like that expression. It is very plain, but what suggestions there are in it! for our sin is our shame, and it is well that the Lord has found a complete covering for it. Sin brought nakedness upon us, and shame is the result, but He who has Christ has lost both sin and shame, for the blood of Jesus removes guilt from the soul and terror from the conscience. Man was naked, and is still naked apart from Christ, but in Christ he is covered, and has become comely before the Lord. Even those eyes of God which see everything cannot see that which does not exist, and God has said of His people's iniquities, "They shall not be." God has cast the sins of His people behind His back, therefore He cannot see them. "If they are searched for, they shall not be found; yea, they shall not be, says the LORD," and if they shall not "be" or exist, then are they gone from His sight.

What a covering this must be. What a purchase this is for a man to buy white raiment of Christ! Imputed and inherent righteousness make up the double garment of righteousness, wrought out for us by the Lord Jesus, and in us by the Holy Ghost. This is a fair garment in which to stand among men, and it will fit us to appear at the judgment seat of God. Jesus says, "I counsel you, buy this of me," no one else has this sacred apparel to dispose of. The fig leaves of earth are a mockery, and the cobwebs of conceit are soon blown aside, but the

covering which adorns and comforts is with Christ alone, whose name is “**THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.**”

Next, our Lord recommends them to buy an eye salve of Him. That is a very curious recommendation, is it not? For they were blind, and can an eye salve give blind men eyes? Many salves are useful for eyes when they are weak or inflamed, but what salve is of any good to a blind man? He says they are blind, and yet recommends them to buy eye salve of Him. Strange counsel! But there is no setting forth gospel principles by human similes without endowing the emblems with something above nature. We must strain that which is human to set forth by it that which is divine.

O you that have no heavenly discernment, that have no eyeballs upon which the light might fall, Christ Jesus counsels you to come and buy of Him the true *collyrium*, that ancient salve of high renown, or something more marvelous still, which will open your eyes so that you shall see that which is invisible, and shall behold the face of God. This is glorious. No other physician has such eye salve. None else can pretend thereto. The Savior has the whole stock of this sovereign remedy, He is the sole dispenser of it, no one can make the like, go, then, to Him who sells, and buy for yourselves.

The counsel of the Lord is not only that we buy of Him everything, but *that we buy the best of everything of Him*. Laodicea had made the mistake of buying second-quality articles, which turned out to be good for nothing. Our Lord says, “I counsel you to buy of me gold.” Gold is the most precious metal, but He would have them buy the best of it, “gold tried in the fire,” gold that has just passed through the assay and has the mint mark upon it, gold that will endure all further tests, having survived that of fire.

O brothers and sisters, our wisdom is to buy what we do buy from Christ, for from Him comes grace which will endure

to the end. I have lately been looking through some of the sufferings of the Waldenses for Christ, and the sad spectacle has produced a most painful effect upon my mind, but I trust also a beneficial one. When I read of the horrible cruelties worked upon them by the Papists, and of the firmness of feeble women and children, as well as men, I asked myself, Could I endure such torments? I did not dare believe that I could, for they suffered agonies which scarcely even the devils of hell could have invented.

Suppose that you and I should possess a sort of grace which would not endure such tests, will it be the right sort of grace? If we are never dragged at the heels of horses, or set up as targets, or dismembered, or burned at a slow fire, yet we ought to have that same kind of grace which made these gracious ones more than conquerors through Jesus Christ. It is true we may never have to suffer martyrdom, but a man must be prepared to give up house, and lands, and wife, and children, yea, and his own life also, sooner than forsake Christ.

Look at the saints in the first days, the young, brave church of Christ, when the world sought to stamp out our holy faith. They defied the world, and Pliny writes to Trajan to know what to do, for the Christians come crowding to the judgment seat to avow their faith. Instead of shunning the conflict they seemed to court it, knowing that to avow themselves Christians was speedy death. They were yet eager to do it, knowing that unutterable torments awaited them, they offered themselves willingly to bear anything for their dear Savior. Could we act in this fashion, think you? Yes, if we have bought the true “gold tried in the fire,” but not else. Is our gold of this sort?

Do not begin talking about how you could endure martyrdom, how do you endure the ordinary trials of life? In those lesser pains that come upon your body—are you patient? Those little disquietudes in the domestic circle—do you keep

your temper over them? Those words that sometimes drop carelessly, not meant to be unkind, but which grate on your feelings—can you forgive them for Christ’s sake, and think no more of them? If not, what kind of gold is this which cannot bear the touch of the acid? Such metal would hardly do to lie on the hob, much less to be put in the flame, if it begins to melt in such mild heat it would utterly vanish in the furnace.

Oh to have gold which has been tested in the center of the flame, such as God Himself will own in the last great day, when He shall come to separate between the precious and the vile. Christ counsels us to buy the best, and we can only get it by buying it of Him, “without money and without price.”

Remember the raiment too, for that is of the best, our Lord calls it “white raiment.” That is a pure color, a holy color, a royal color. We put on the Lord Jesus as our joy, our glory, our righteousness. To walk with Him in white is real honor, and sure acceptance, it marks us out as victors through Him that has loved us. This robe is the true wedding dress, a holiday robe, and yet a serviceable garment arraying a man from head to foot. Are you wearing it? Is your sin hidden? Does it not at times appear? Does it not come before your own conscience? “Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God, but if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.”

Have you this covering so that you will not be afraid to die in it, nor afraid to stand before the blazing judgment seat in it? Are you sure, certain, positive that your sin is put away in Christ Jesus? This is what you need, and you must not be content with less. If you must play at haphazard do it with your estates, do it with your lives, but never leave your soul affairs to be a matter of chance. Make sure work for eternity. A man likes to be quite positive about the title deeds if he buys a farm, but what is that? If I wish for heaven, I want to be sure that I have it, sure that I

have Christ who is the glory of it, sure that I am pardoned and renewed, which is my fitness for it. One single note of question upon that matter will banish all peace and joy out of your heart. God grant us grace to buy the white raiment through which nothing of sin can be seen, for all guilt is gone.

And as to the eye salve, it is the best possible one, for Jesus says, “Anoint your eyes with eye salve that you may see.” Eye salve that can make a blind man see stands in the front rank of all the medicaments that ever can be sold. Oh, for grace to get it, so that we may see and know spiritual things. Can you say, “One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see”? Are you the pure in heart who see God? Is God about you wherever you are? Can you see your own sin and hate it? Can you see the power of Christ’s blood and delight to be washed in it? Can you see the spiritual kingdom, or do you only see the things of your trade and business, the things which blind worldlings can perceive? O God, give us real sight that we may see heaven and delight in it, see hell and flee the sin that will bring us there, that we may see Christ and rejoice in Him evermore. He counsels us to do this.

So I must come to a close by noticing that *all this is the counsel of Christ*, and the counsel of Christ to a people that were proud and self-conceited. He gave those counsel who thought they needed none. Does not this reveal infinite grace, that He should come to such and sit down by them and say, “Come now, put your case into My hand, it is a very bad one, and I advise you to come to Me for help”? Oh, how tenderly I would try to speak this morning in imitation of the soft tones of Jesus.

O you who have thought of yourself other than the truth, I do not counsel you to despair. At the sight of the truth I do not counsel you to say, “I will give it all up, there is no hope.” “No,” Christ says, “be advised, take counsel, I counsel you to come to Me now, and get in very truth all that which you only

had in fancy. All things are ready for you. You have not to search for the gold and dig it up from the mine, here it is, come and buy it.” “Lord, I have not a penny to buy it with.” That does not matter. Buy it without money and without price. These are the easy terms of the gracious Savior. Believe, and be rich. When Satan tells me, or conscience tells me, that I am not a Christian, that I am not saved, then I find it wise to say, “I will begin now. If I have made a mistake, if I have been presumptuous, if I have not truly believed, then I will believe at once, and lay hold upon Jesus at this good hour.”

I recommend you who are not puffed up to take Christ’s counsel, for when He counsels these proud ones to come I am sure His advice is good for you too. It is always wise to get gold when you can buy it for nothing. I warrant you if the Bank of England put up a notification that they would sell any quantity of pure bullion for nothing tomorrow morning, our Stock Exchange men, instead of turning into Capel Court, would take the other side of the street, and dispose at once of the Bank’s surplus. There is a ready market for pure gold at this extraordinary minimum.

Come, then, and accept the gold of free grace. It is sure to be useful, therefore come along, you that love Christ and you that are afraid you do not love Him. Come along, all of you, come and buy this “gold tried in the fire.” You have never made a better investment in all your lives. May the good Master sweetly lead you so to do.

But what a rebuke this is to all boasting. The Lord does not say to us, “You have been very foolish in talking about your riches,” but He convicts us by saying, “I counsel you to buy gold.” He does not say, “You are stupid to glory in your dress,” but He convicts us by saying, “Buy raiment.” He does not condemn us for pretending to be able to see when we are blind, but He cries, “Anoint your eyes with eye salve.” Is not this a

sweet way of making us feel our error? Perhaps you would turn away from stern rebuke, but you cannot turn from love.

Come now, members of this church and members of no church, come, buy these three precious things, “without money and without price.” You cannot take better counsel than that of the Son of God, therefore, do as He bids you, and buy at once.

1678 SAMARITAN WOMAN'S MISSION – JOHN 4:27-30

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, September 10, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

And upon this came His disciples, and marveled that He talked with the woman; yet no man said, “What seek You?” or, “Why talk You with her?”

The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and said to the men, “Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?” Then they went out of the city, and came unto Him. — John 4:27-30

[Scripture Read before Sermon – John 4:1-42]

BEHOLD OUR LORD AND MASTER with divinely skillful art seeking after a single soul! We must have large congregations or we are disinclined for soul-winning. The habit of the age is to do nothing but what is ostentatious; every work must be with beat of drum or sound of tambourine. I pray that the Lord may work in us the steadfast desire to do good on the quiet, by stealth, when no one looks on, when not a single disciple is near. Oh that we may have such an estimate of the value of a single soul that we count whole days well spent to bring one fallen woman or one drunk to the Savior's feet. Blessed is he who works on though he is never heard of, and looks for his reward from his Master. In the heat of the day the Lord Jesus found

rest and refreshment in speaking to one whom many would scarcely look upon, except with eyes of scorn. Blessed Savior, we do not marvel as the disciples did that You did speak with the woman, but we do wonder with a higher kind of astonishment that You ever did speak to the likes of us, who have so sadly fallen, and done You dishonor, and grieved Your heart. We are amazed that He who is the glory of heaven, “Light of light, very God of very God,” should shroud Himself in the likeness of sinful flesh, and being found in fashion as a man should seek after us unworthy ones. Oh, the compassion of the Redeemer’s heart!

Read this chapter through carefully, and see the skill which that compassion taught Him. How sweetly ready He was to converse with her and to take up her questions. Never imagine that the thirty years of retirement at Nazareth were wasted. I would gladly go, if I were young, for thirty years to learn how to talk as He did, if His own Spirit would teach me the lesson. He was a perfect teacher because *as man* He had lent a willing ear to the heavenly instruction of the Holy Spirit, and therefore grew in knowledge and fitness for His work. As says that notable Scripture, “The Lord God has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: He wakens morning by morning, He wakens My ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God has opened My ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.” By communion with God in private, and by watching men in seclusion, He learned both the mind of God and the nature of man, so as to know how to handle the human mind. Men are “unpredictable cattle,” and can only be managed by a wise hand. Many an earnest fool has driven a soul to hell in his endeavor to drag it to heaven by force, for human wills yield not to such rough force, but rebel the more. Souls have to be brought to salvation by gentleness and wisdom such as the

Savior used when He fascinated the Samaritan woman into eternal life, and enticed her to the truth, so I can only describe that wondrous power which He exercised over her in the few short but blessed sentences with which He addressed her.

Now, turn a moment from that glorious One, that perfect man, and yet infinite God, whom we would lovingly adore before we look away from Him. Here come His disciples! They have been in the city to buy food—an errand most necessary—that they and their Teacher might live. But look! *When they perceive Him talking with a woman they marvel*, each in his own way. Some are dumfounded, and cannot explain the phenomenon. Others look as if they would interpose if they dared, and would cry to the woman, “Away you vixen, what right have you here, speaking to such a One as our Leader, whose shoelaces even we are not worthy to unloose? Your approach dishonors Him. Take yourself away.” They did say so with their eyes, though awe of their Lord restrained their tongues, for these disciples of Jesus were steeped in the customary antipathies of the age. First, it was sufficiently offensive that the person with whom Jesus was conversing was a woman. My beloved sisters, you owe much to the gospel, for it is only by its agency that you are raised to your proper place.

For what said the Rabbis? “Rather burn the sayings of the law than teach them to women.” And again, “Let no man prolong conversation with a woman. Let no one converse with a woman in the streets, not even with his own wife.” Women were thought to be unfit for profound religious instruction, and altogether inferior beings. My sisters, we do not think that you are superior to us, though some of you perhaps fancy so, but we are right glad to acknowledge your equality, and to know that in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female. Jesus has lifted you up to your true place, side by side with man. Even the apostles were tainted at first with that horrible superstition

which made them marvel that Jesus openly talked with a woman. Moreover, they wondered that He could talk with such a woman! I do not suppose they knew all about her character, but there is a look about the fallen which betrays them, they cannot conceal the boldness which a course of vice usually produces. They may have thought, "If He had talked with an aged matron, a saintly mother in Israel, it might not have been surprising, but how can He converse with such a woman?" They did not as yet understand His mission to rescue the perishing and save the lost.

This poor woman also had the misfortune to be a Samaritan, and above all things Jews hated Samaritans, as aliens and heretics, who dared to call Jacob their father and to believe themselves orthodox. Jews and Samaritans were much alike, and you know the sects that approach nearest to each other usually reserve their most bitter hatred for their next of kin. They will tolerate those who are far removed from them, because they are altogether in the darkness of error, and so are somewhat excusable. But those who have so much light, they detest for not seeing eye to eye with themselves. We pity a mute man, for he cannot speak at all, but we are indignant that one who can say, "Sibboleth," will not take a little more trouble and pronounce it, "Shibboleth," as we do. Surely he might go that other inch and be quite right. This woman was one of those Samaritan heretics who had dared to set up an opposition temple to the one at Jerusalem, and say that they also were the people of God, so the disciples shrank from her, and marveled that Jesus did not do the same. How could so good a man mix Himself up with such people?

I have myself heard a great deal of foolishness spoken about mixing up with certain people, because we dare to meet with them upon some common ground to accomplish a right purpose. I have sometimes wondered whether people ever read

of Abraham, when he fought for the cause of the king of Sodom. A horrible man, I have no doubt, that monarch was, yet when his country had been plundered by the invading kings, Abraham marched out on behalf of the King of Sodom, not that he cared for him, but that he desired to deliver his nephew Lot. For that reason he is found in some measure of association with Sodom's king, but when the object upon which they were united was achieved, then see how the princely Abraham washes his hands of the man. He says, "I will not take from you a thread even to a shoe-lace, lest you should say, 'I have made Abraham rich.'" Thus there may be a temporary union among men, between whom there is the widest difference, and this apparent unity may be lawful and expedient because the end to be gained is altogether good. Our blessed Lord was seeking the good of this unholy woman, and therefore He was fully justified in talking with her. Thereby He rebuked the superstition of His followers more effectually than by words.

There is another side to the question. How could these disciples marvel that He spoke with anybody, after having chosen *them* and called *them*? Surely, when they frowned on others they forgot the dunghills where they grew. If they had only remembered where they were when He found them, and how often they had grieved Him by their perverseness, they would have reserved their surprise for their own cases. Ah, brethren, ever since the Lord spoke with me, I have never marveled that He spoke with anybody. It has not crossed my mind to make it any subject of wonder that He should stoop to the lowest and humblest now that He has stooped to me. Yet I fancy I have seen in certain brethren, evident signs that they forget that they were themselves once strangers in Egypt. They forget that grace washed and cleansed them, or else they would have been filthy still, for Paul truly says, "such were some of you." I am sorry when saved ones affect superfine purity and

marvelous spirituality, and turn away from such as Jesus would have welcomed.

Alas, such disciples have little of the tenderness of their Master! Our divine Lord has more tenderness for sinners than the whole of us put together. There is more love in His soul towards lost ones than there is in all these thousands of believers here present, though I hope that many of your hearts beat high with a loving desire that the guilty may be delivered from the wrath to come. But look at the disciples! Look, yonder is John, that sweet-souled John, and yet he marvels. And there is Peter, good but faulty, and he marvels. And there is Thomas the thoughtful, and he marvels. They are all good men, and yet they are marveling that Jesus is gracious to a poor woman. Oh, Peter, and John, and James, and the rest of you, look into your own hearts, and let a glance of the Holy Spirit lighten up the darkness of your spirits, and you will renounce this self-righteous marveling which grieves the woman, and you will enter into deeper sympathy with your Lord's love. Dear friends, let us never disdain the worst of men or women, but seek with all our might to woo and win them for our Lord. Oh, to have hearts of mercies as Jesus had! This will well become the followers of the compassionate Son of man.

Look, as the result of this conduct of the disciples, *one of the sweetest conferences that were ever held was broken up*, and brought to a close at its very climax. Just when Jesus had said, "I that speak unto you am He," then it must end, for here they come, these cold, unsympathetic ones. Yet they were disciples, were they not? Oh, yes, and true disciples, too, but alas, no breakers of communion are more blamable or more frequent in the offense than Christ's own disciples when they are out of sympathy with their Master. You see, they are thinking about the meat, and about the Savior's need of it, and these thoughts were most proper, but not very elevated or spiritual, and they come

wondering that Jesus speaks with a woman, and so the holy conference ends, and the woman must go. Oh, when any of you draw near to Christ, and He is just lifting the silver veil from His dear face, and your eyes are beginning to behold Him, mind that you keep your door shut. “Oh, but it is a good man at the door.” Yes, but he will be just as likely to mar your fellowship as anybody else. The best of men may sometimes intrude between you and the Well-beloved, and fellowship which seemed as if it must mellow into heaven itself, will come to a speedy and sorrowful close. I do not blame Peter that he wanted tabernacles in which to remain upon the top of the mount, for he was pretty well aware of what he might meet upon the plain. Do you not often wish that you could sing—

“Sequestered from the noise and strife,
The lust, the pomp, and pride of life;
For heaven I will my heart prepare,
And have my conversation there.”

Although the conference was thus broken up, the consequence was the Lord's glory, even as often out of evil He works good. Since the woman cannot sit and gaze upon the divine face of her Lord, nor hear the strange music which flowed from His blessed lips, she will give herself to holy activity, she goes her way to the city, and she speaks to the men. This is well, there is little to deplore when men's hearts are so right that you cannot take them away from glorifying Christ, do what you may. When, if you disturb their private communion, they are ready at once for public service. Driven away from sitting, like Mary, at the Master's feet, let us rise to play the Martha, by preparing a table for the Lord. Always reckon, dear friends, whenever you are taken off from your usual course of life, as it were by a jolt, that, the Lord has some special work

for you to do. Do not fret, or try to back the engine to get on the old lines again. No, if the switch is turned by the divine hand, go on, He that has the management of all the railroads of your life knows better which way your soul should go than you yourself can know. I have observed Christian people jerked out of a pious family where they were extremely happy, and placed in the midst of ungodliness, a situation not of their own choosing or seeking, but appointed of the Lord, that they may bring godliness into that house, and shed light in the midst of the darkness. Friend, you, too, may be taken away from this church where your soul has flourished, and you may feel like one banished and bereaved. Well, never mind. If you are sent to some church where everything is dreary, and dead, go there like a firebrand to set them on fire. Your Lord would not have permitted the breaking up of your peace unless He had some high service for you. Since you are His servant, find out His will, and do it. God will thus honor Himself in you, and by and by He will honor and comfort you also.

Observe that *the woman now becomes a messenger for Christ*. She has to quit conferring *with* Him to go and testify *about* Him. She did not go unbidden though, for she remembered that the Lord had said at an early period of the conversation, “Go, call your husband and come here.” So she goes to call her husband. It is well to have a warrant for what we do. Observe, she interprets her orders very liberally. She thought as the Christ had said, “You have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband,” He could not have limited her errand to one who was not her husband except in name, and so she might as well call any of the six men with whom she had dwelt, and therefore she might speak to all the men who were loitering about the public square, and tell them what she had seen. Remember how our Savior gave a large interpretation of His own prophetic mission. He was not sent as a teacher except to

the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but He went to the very edge of His diocese, if He did not go over it. He went to the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and when a woman came out of those parts, He had healing for her daughter, though He did sow most of His seed upon the acres of the Holy Land, yet He made it fly over the boundary. In fact, He sowed all the ages, and on this once barbarous island there have fallen blessed handfuls which are bringing forth fruit to His glory. Always go to the verge of your commission, never stop short of it. Try to do more good than you can, and it is very possible that you will be successful. Indeed, if you only try to do what you can do you will do little. But when in faith you attempt what you cannot alone accomplish, God will be at your back, and in your weakness His strength shall be made clear.

Notice that *the woman leaves her waterpot*. The Spirit of God thought well to record this circumstance, and therefore I think there must be a measure of teaching in it. She left her waterpot, first, for speed. Perhaps you have got it into your head that it was an ordinary English waterpot, such as you water the garden with, possibly you so picture it, rose and all. Nothing of the sort, it was a big jar, or large pitcher of earthenware, she had to carry on her head or her shoulder, quite a load for her, and so she left it that she might run the more quickly. She was a wise woman to leave her waterpot when she needed to move rapidly. Others think she did so because she was so taken up with her errand that she forgot her pitcher. It is blessed forgetfulness which comes of absorption in a holy design. When the King's business requires haste, it is wise to leave behind everything that would hinder. Our Lord Jesus Himself forgot His hunger in His zeal to guide a soul to peace, and it is said of Him in the Psalm, "I forget to eat My bread." He was so absorbed in His heavenly work that He said, "I have meat to eat that you know not of." A man has hardly felt the power of eternal things

unless at times he forgets some earthly matters. If a man is called to rush for his life through a room full of crockery there will, probably, be a number of breakages. You cannot think of everything at once, your mind is limited, and it is not advisable that you should divide the strength of your thoughts by having two or more aims. So she left her waterpot. Without thought she hit upon as good an action as thought would have suggested. The waterpot would have hindered her, but it might be useful to the Christ and His disciples. Thus they could give Him to drink. He was thirsty, and probably so were they, and with her pitcher they could help themselves. Besides, it was a pledge that she was coming back. She said thereby, "I am running away on an errand, but I shall come back again. I have not listened to the great Teacher for the last time. I shall return, and hear Him further, till I know Him better and trust Him more fully." So it was significant that she left her waterpot. Sometimes you will have to leave your shop to win a soul. You will cast up a row of figures wrongly, and wonder why, and the reason will be that before your mind there fluttered the soul of a swearer or the figure of a drunk, or the image of a fallen woman, and your heart was filled with the longing to find the lost sheep. Never mind. I dare say the woman had her water pot again, and you will get back to business, again, and rectify your blunder, and attend to the shop, and set all matters right, and if a soul is saved you will have made a profit by any loss you have sustained.

We have started the woman on her mission. Now I want you to *observe particularly her mode of address*, for there is teaching here. She said to the men, "Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" Observe first, when she did go back to the men, she had but one aim, and that was to bring them to Jesus. She cries, "Come, see." She did not tell them anything about their sin at the time, nor try to

reform their habits. She called them at once to Him who could set them right. She knew that if she could bring them to Christ all things would inevitably come right. It is good for you to shoot only at one target. Choose your design and aim at it, and not at two objects. Drive away at the souls of men in the name of God to get them to Christ, and nothing short of Him. Labor for this; be willing to live for this, and to die for this, that men may be saved by Immanuel's love, and blood, and Spirit. This Samaritan woman aimed at this object and tried to gain it by an exceedingly earnest address. I warrant you she said it very prettily, "Come, come, come, and see a man that told me all things that ever I did." Perhaps with all her charms, with all the softness of her winsome tongue, with all the entreaty of her bright eyes, she cried, "Come, every one of you; come, see for yourselves, a man which told me all things that ever I did." If you go upon the Lord's errands take your heart with you. Speak every single syllable earnestly, and if you are thoroughly alive you will not need to be taught the way of doing it. The way comes naturally to those whose hearts are set upon the end.

She spoke self-forgetfully, she seemed entirely to have forgotten herself, and yet she remembered herself—a paradox, but not a contradiction. She said, "Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did." She quoted herself, and yet if she had thought of herself, she would not have said a word on the subject of her own life. She might have feared that the men would have replied—"A pretty story that must be!" They knew her well, and might have turned round and said, "You are a beauty, to come here and talk to us in this style!" No, she let them talk of her as they pleased. "Come; see a man which told me all things that ever I did." That putting aside of all affectation, that genuine simplicity, was part of her power. Never try to be otherwise than you are. If you have been a great sinner, be ashamed of it, but do not be ashamed of that love

which saved you from it, so as to refuse to bear witness to its power. Put away the thought of what people will think of you, and only look to what they will think of Jesus for having forgiven and renewed you.

Note how short she was. Ralph Erskine calls her the female preacher. I am not so sure of the correctness of the title. If women preached just as long as she did, and no longer, no one could find fault with them. Her testimony lies all in one verse, and is an invitation and a question. There needed no more words, no, not another half a word. She said exactly enough, for she was successful in leading the men to Jesus, who could do the preaching far better than she could. I cannot call her words a sermon, at any rate you would not care for me to preach so briefly. However, brevity is a great virtue. Do not crave to be fluent, only ask to be earnest.

Then, how vivacious she was, “Come, see a man,” the words are all alive, and very far from being dull and heavy. “Come, see.” It is almost as laconic as Julius Caesar’s famous dispatch, “I came, I saw, I conquered.” “Come; see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?” Then, it was so sensible. There is a dispute about the exact force of what the woman said, but most of those who give us precise translations differ from our common version. It is what she meant and believed, but not exactly what she said. She probably said, “Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: Can this be the Christ?”—or, “This is not the Christ, is He?” She did not say He was, but she suggested it with great modesty for the men to examine. She believed that Jesus was the Christ, but she knew that men do not like to be taught by such as her, and so she humbly threw it out for their examination. “Can this be the anointed One whom we are expecting? Come and judge.” She did not express all she believed, lest she should provoke them to opposition, she was adroit and wise. She fished after

the manner of her Master; for she could not but feel how dexterously He had fished for her. She was an apt scholar, and humbly copied the Friend who had blessed her, “Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did: can this possibly be the Christ?” This led them to come, if it was only to set the woman right. Possibly they thought her a poor, mistaken woman, but in their superior wisdom, they would look into the matter, and so the thing she desired was granted her. Oh, to have our wits about us for Jesus!

But the argument is exceedingly strong; let her put it how she may. “This man has told me all things that ever I did.” She might have said, if she thought it wise to say it, “He must be the Christ,” and that is my last point, namely, the grand argument drawn from herself, and adapted to the men. Observe the force of her reasoning. His power to read her heart, and manifest her to herself, was conclusive evidence to her that a special anointing was upon Him.

But before I get at that I must have you examine more fully the whole of the woman's little message, of which it was a part. It divides itself into two parts. You have been looking for firstly and secondly all this while, and now you shall have them. There are two parts in her sermon. The first is *the invitation*, “Come; see a man which told me all things that ever I did.” The second is *the argument*, “Is not this the Christ?”

I. Consider at once THE INVITATION. It is a clever as well as a genuine and hearty invitation. She says, “Come, see.” This was putting it most fairly, and men like a fair proposal and the Holy Spirit works by means which suit the mind. She does not say, “You must and shall believe what I say.” No, no, she is too sensible. She says, “Come and see for yourselves,” and that is exactly what I want to say to every unconverted person here this morning. My Lord Jesus is the most precious Savior that I ever dreamed of. Come and test Him! He is altogether lovely,

and He has blessed my soul unspeakably, but I do not want you to believe because of my saying, come and see for yourselves. Can anything be fairer? Seek Him by prayer. Trust Him by faith. Test His gospel for yourselves. It is an old-fashioned exhortation, “Oh taste and see that the Lord is good,” and again, “Prove Me now, says the Lord of hosts.” In fact, this is Christ’s own word to the first disciples, “Come and see,” and they used it when pleading with others, saying to them, “Come and see.”

Moreover, this woman’s invitation throws the responsibility upon them. She says, “Come and see.” Thus I would say to you—if you do not come and see, I cannot help it, and I cannot help you either. I cannot stand sponsor for you, use your own judgments and clear your own consciences. Come and see on your own accounts. If you do not, then the blame must rest with you. If you do, then your personal investigation will be sure to end in a blessing. O dear hearers, I may preach the gospel to you, but I cannot go to Christ in your place. It is mine to entreat and persuade, and to use every kind of means by which I may get you to the Savior, but it is a personal matter with each of you. Oh that the Holy Spirit would lead you to come yourselves to Jesus, for it must be your own act and deed through His blessed working upon your nature. *You* must come, *you* must repent, *you* must believe, *you* must lay hold on eternal life for yourselves. Nothing but personal religion can possibly save you. The woman’s call was a good exhortation in that respect.

Then, is it not pleasantly put, so as to prove the sympathy of the speaker? She does not say, as she might have said, “Go, see a man.” No, “*Come*, see a man,” as much as to say, “Come along. I will go with you and lead the way. You shall not say I have seen enough of Him and do not care to go again, and now want to send you packing there alone because I am tired of Him.

No, come! Come along. Come with me—we will all go together. The more I have seen of Him the more I want to see. Come, see the wondrous man.” Dear friends, when you try to win a soul, do not try the “go” system, but use the “come” system. When man cries, “I cannot go to Christ,” or, “I will not go to Christ,” look at him through your tears and cry out, “Friend, I am a sinner like yourself, and have no hope but in the precious blood of Jesus. Come, let me pray with you. Let us go to Jesus together.” Then, when you pray, do not say, “Lord, I am one of your saints, and come to you bringing this sinner.” That may be true, but it is not a wise way of speaking. Cry, “Lord, here are two sinners that deserve Your wrath, and we come to ask You in Your pity to give the Savior to us, and renew our hearts by Your Spirit.” That is the way God helps soul-winners to draw others. When we say, “Come,” let us lead the way ourselves. What you wish another to do it will be wise to do yourself, for example has more power than precept. How would you like the sinner to turn round upon you and say, “You may well give away advice when you do not intend to use it yourself.” No, but “Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did.” A sister’s heart spoke out in that word, “Come.”

Again, what a blessed vanishing of the speaker there is. I have heard of brethren whose preaching is spoiled because they are so self-conscious. The man wishes you to feel that he is speaking in first-rate style, and is an eminent divine. When he has finished, the common exclamation is, “I never heard such a clever man.” But he was not as wise as he might have been or should have been, for he who preaches rightly makes you forget himself. In fact, the observation about him, if it comes out at all, is in this fashion—“I did not detect any eloquence; anybody might have talked like that, but somehow I have felt as I never felt before.” The fish knows little about the angler, but he knows when he has swallowed the hook. When the truth has

gone right home to the hearer's heart, the form of speech is of little consequence. This woman does not say anything to make the Samaritan men admire her, but she draws them to Jesus with the exhortation, "Come, see a man." What she does mention about herself is with the design of extolling the Savior. That is a grand sentence of John the Baptist, "He must increase, but I must decrease." Less, less, less of John, that there may be all the more of Christ. There is but one great universe, and Christ and you are in it. The more space you occupy, there must be so much the less for Jesus. When you get less and less there is more for Jesus, and when you reach the vanishing point then Jesus is all in all, and that is exactly what you should aim at. This sensible woman's invitation deserves to be copied by every worker.

II. Now for **THE ARGUMENT**, with which I close.

An argument lies concealed here, and if you look at the text a minute or two you will discover it. She conceals it because she is persuaded that they have already agreed to it. It is this, "If Jesus is the Christ, the anointed, then it is fit that you should come with me and see Him." She does not argue that point, because every Samaritan agreed to it. If Jesus is the Christ then we ought to go and listen to Him, look at Him and become His followers. Alas, my dear hearers, I am obliged to urge that argument with many of you, because you are not as practical as these Samaritans. You believe that Jesus is the Christ, I suppose every man and woman of you does that. Why, then, do you not believe in Him as your Savior? You never had a doubt about His Godhead, why is He not your God? "If I tell you the truth," says Christ, "why do you not believe Me?" If this is the Anointed One whom God has sent to take away the sins of men, why have you not sought Him that He may rid you of your sins? If this is the propitiation which God has set forth, why have you not accepted this propitiation? If this is the

fountain wherein sin can be washed away, why are you not washed? There is no reason in your course of action, it is illogical and irrational. If there is a Savior, the man who is taught right reason vows that he will have Him. If there is a fountain that can wash away sin, he resolves to be washed in it, if he can get right with God by any process, he hastens to be rectified. I say, this woman did not argue the point, because it did not need arguing. It goes without saying and there let it stand.

But what she did argue was this, “This man who was just now sitting on the well, is He not the Christ?” How did she prove it? First, she did as good as say, “He must be Christ, *because He has revealed me to myself*, He has told me all things that ever I did.” The words are wide. Stop, dear woman, surely He has not revealed all your life, certainly not in words. He has revealed your unchastity, but nothing else. But she was right. Were you ever out in a black and murky night when a single lightning flash has come? It has only struck one oak in the field, but in so doing it has revealed all the landscape. It struck one object, but all around you was light as day for the moment. So, when the Lord Jesus Christ revealed this woman's lustfulness, she saw clearly the whole of her life at a single view, and the Lord had indeed told her all things that ever she did. Do you wonder that she said, “Is not this the Christ?”

Beloved, no one proves Himself to be truly anointed unless He begins by showing you your sins. If any teacher leads you to hope that, without repentance, or any sense of sin, you may be saved, he is not of Christ. I charge you; fling away any hope which is not consistent with your own entire hopelessness apart from Jesus. If you have not known yourself a sinner, you cannot know Christ as a Savior. Some are preaching nowadays a dry-eyed faith, and men seem to jump into assurance as if there were no new birth, no conviction of sin, and no

repentance. But it is not so, “You must be born again.” That birth is not without pangs. Trust in Christ brings a hatred of sin and mourning because of it. A man cannot hate what he does not know, but this woman was made to see her sin, and that sight proved that the Messiah was dealing with her. The non-repentance prophets cry, “Peace, peace,” where there is no peace. They film the sore, but Jesus puts the knife into it, lays it wide open, and makes the patient see the gangrene of the wound, and then He closes it up, and with His heavenly ointment makes a sure cure of it. There is no binding up the heart that was never broken. There is no comforting a man who has always been comfortable. There is no making a man righteous who always was righteous. There is no washing a man who has no filthiness. No, and this is what the Messiah does, He lays bare the disease, and this is a proof that He is sent of God, because He does not adopt the flimsy, flattering mode of deceivers, but goes straight to the truth. Her argument is—He must be the Messiah, for He revealed me to myself.

Secondly, *He must be the Messiah, for He has revealed Himself to me.* “No sooner did I see my filthiness than I saw at once that He was every way ready to cleanse me.” A sinner’s eye is never ready to see the Savior till first it has seen the sin. When the man sees despair written across the face of human strength, then he turns and sees hope mildly beaming from the kind eyes of the Son of man, but not till then. Jesus has revealed Himself, and now she says, “I see that He knows me and knows all about me.” Wonderful it is how the gospel robe exactly fits a man, when he gets it and puts it on he feels that He who made this garment knew His form. Perhaps you have some special weakness or singular deformity, but you soon perceive that Jesus knew all about it, for His salvation exactly meets the lack. There is a bath, ah, He knew I was filthy. There is a robe, ah, He knew I was naked. There is eye salve; He knew that I was

blind. Here is a ring for my finger; He knew I wanted a forget-me-not to keep me in memory of mercy received. Here are shoes for my bare feet, and a banquet for my griping hunger. Every need is taken care of, and this proves the omniscience of my Savior. "Therefore," she said, "He knows all about me. He must be infinitely wise; He must be the Christ." This is good arguing, is it not?

Then she seemed to say to them too, "This is a great deal more to me than it can be to you, *for He has dealt personally with me*, and therefore I abide in my assurance that He is the Christ. But go and learn the same arguments for yourselves." Brethren, if the Lord Jesus Christ had told this woman all that ever her third husband did, it would have had far less power over her than telling her all she had done herself. When conviction comes personally home, and the discovery is all about your own state and character, it has a special power over your heart and mind to make you say, "This is the Christ." Also, my brethren, at the remembrance of my Lord's surgery when I was wounded and sorely broken, I am ready to cry, "See how He handled me. Never was a hand so strong and yet so tender, never a physician with such a lion's heart, and such a lady's hand. I can feel His strength as He holds me up and I can feel His tenderness as He embraces me. Surely He is the Anointed, and sent of the Lord to bind up the brokenhearted, for He has bound up my broken heart. The case is proven to me, come and experience the same conviction within yourselves."

Moreover, and perhaps there is force in this which has not been noticed, she says, "Come, see," as much as to say, "*You may come, I know*, for when I came to the well, He did not look daggers at me. And when I did not give Him water, He did not grow hot with me and say, 'Disrespectful woman, I will not speak to you.' No, but I was at home with Him in a moment. Come; see a man who made Himself so at home with me that

He told me all that ever I did. I am sure He must be the Messiah. The Messiah is to come to open the blind eyes, and He must necessarily be among the blind to perform the miracle. He is to fetch prisoners out of prison, and they that are in prison are the lowest class, and yet He goes to them. So, come along. I will go first, and introduce you to Him.”

That is the woman's little speech, and how good it is! I am going to add a bit to it which she did not know, but which we know. I wish I knew how to say something that would make you unconverted ones hurry to Christ, but if anything ought to do so it is this. Suppose you never do come to Christ in this life, and die without Him? God grant you may not die without having listened to Him and received Him, but if you do, you will be awakened at the last day from your grave with the blast of a terrible trumpet, and with the cry of, “Come to judgment! Come to judgment! Come away!” Whether you will or not, you will have to come, and see a man sitting upon the great white throne, judging the nations. And do you know what He will do with you then? He will tell you all things that ever you did, and as the scenes pass before your mind's eye, and as your own words go ringing again through your ears, you will be sorely distressed. Perhaps this morning's scene will be revived before you, and conscience will tell you, “You were at the Tabernacle that morning. The gospel was put plainly to you, by one who in his heart longed for you to be saved, but you did despite to all those entreaties and turned away.” I tell you it will be your hell, for Jesus to tell you all things that ever you did, and you will then see the argument, “Is not this the Christ?” But alas, He will be no Savior to you, for you refused Him. He will then tell you, “I called, but you refused. I stretched out My hands, but no man regarded.” Still shall proceed that awful tale of all things that ever you did, concluding with this—you refused mercy, you rejected Jesus, you turned away from salvation, you

would not have this man to save you, and therefore have you come to have your past made the fuel for your everlasting burning. God grant that no one here may ever come to that. No, if I had the task to select one man out of this congregation that would have to spend an eternity in having his life rehearsed to him, where should I find him? No, I cannot see one that I dare to pitch upon, not one— not one, — not even the worst man or woman here. I would not if I could. O God, of Your mercy suffer no one here to know the terror of being driven away forever from Your presence and the glory of your power, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

1679 ONE WAR OVER, ANOTHER BEGUN – JUD. 6:22-24

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, September 17, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, “Alas, O Lord GOD! For because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face.”

And the LORD said unto him, “Peace be unto you; fear not: you shall not die.” Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it JEHOVAH-Shalom. — Judges 6:22-24

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Judges 6:1-27]

THESE MIDIANITES were wandering Bedouins from Arabia, and from the east country round about the Holy Land. Like those who represent them in the present day, they were masters of the art of plundering, and knew no bowels of compassion. They generally lived a hard life themselves, and when they had an opportunity to feast on the spoils of others, they rioted without stint, and left a famine behind them. Most fitly does the Scripture compare them to grasshoppers, for both in number and in destructive force they were like those terrible devourers.

God had brought them upon Israel to scourge that nation because it had been so foolish and so ungrateful as to set up the gods of the heathen, and to forget the one mighty God who

was so especially and graciously their patron and defender. They were impoverished and ground down to the very last degree by these plunderers, who left no food either for men or cattle. The poor Israelites, creeping forth from their dens and caves, attempted to carry on the work of husbandry, and sowed the land, but when the time came for reaping, the marauders came forth once more, took away their harvest, and despoiled their pastures again.

Then, as usual, Israel cried unto JEHOVAH, and His ear was opened to their groaning. Their afflictions made them weary of their idols, and caused them to say, “We will return unto our first husband, for it was better with us then than now.” God in His great mercy raised up for them a deliverer, Gideon, a mighty man of valor, who distinguished himself in various skirmishes with the foe! His name was already a terror to Midian, for he who dreamed of the barley cake which smote the tent, and it lay along, said to his fellow — “This is none other than Gideon, the son of Joash.”

His character has never been sufficiently admired, Scripture names much less bright than his have been preferred before him by the general ministry, yet he deserves far better treatment. He was a man gentle and yet strong, cautious and yet venturesome, a searching inquirer, and an intense believer. While he was a sort of foreshadowing of David, he had much of the afterglow of Joshua. He was a truly great man, though his later days were overshadowed by a grievous religious error, and a sad moral fault. Despite his failings he was one of the greatest of the heroes of faith.

This man went to his work with the Bedouin in much the same manner as that which has proved so successful in Egypt during the past week. He was not in a hurry to venture upon a pitched battle, but waited his time, and then by a sudden and

unexpected attack he struck the whole host with panic, so that they fled at once, and Midian was smitten as one man.

It is very singular how history repeats itself, and how all events go to exhibit the singular truthfulness of the Bible record. These wild Arabs can clearly be overcome by a single blow if it takes them when they feel secure. Formidable as they are as plunderers, and great as they are at boasting, they are not able to stand against a hand to hand onslaught, true valor drives them before it like a rolling thing before the whirlwind, scattering them like chaff before the tempest. The leaders flee, two of the minor ones, Oreb and Zeeb, the raven and the wolf, are first captured, and by and by the greater generals, who had fled first of all, are taken by the victorious band. The leaders were ahead of all the others in flight then as they have been in the late campaign. In later days the destruction of their mighty ones became a proverbial curse, "Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb: yea, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna." There are many points of likeness between the two campaigns, but this is not our theme today.

Let us think for a while of Gideon, in order that we may see that we ourselves are or may be somewhat parallels with him. We may not have to smite the Bedouin as he had, but unto a spiritual warfare God has called many of us, and though He intends to use us, and to get unto Himself victory by us, yet it may be that at this moment we are in fear. We are now passing through the same mental processes as those which educated Gideon, and we are being prepared thereby for future conflict and conquest.

I. I shall begin by asking you to dwell for a minute upon **GIDEON'S SIGH FOR PEACE**, for he loved not war, but pined for quiet.

He called the name of the altar—"JEHOVAH-Shalom," which the margin reads, "The LORD send peace." You see

therefore that deeper down in his spirit than any desire for warlike honor there was a yearning after peace. He wanted not the spoils of princes, he only desired to plow, and sow, and reap in peace.

And do you wonder at it, when *the ills of war were all around?* He had for a long time seen in the cases of his friends and neighbors the desolating effects of war, their property was taken from them, their bread was stolen out of their mouths, their children were slain, and themselves made to hide away upon the tops of mountains or in caverns among the hills. Life became intolerable amid such privations and dangers. Gideon must have felt his heart swell with grief and indignation as he looked upon the remnant of Israel hunted like partridges upon the mountains, though once they had dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree. The Bedouin styled the valley of Jezreel, “the meadows of GOD,” how grievous to see those fat pastures trodden down by the feet of the invaders!

Ah, little can you and I imagine the horrors of war. We read of it, and our sympathies are touched, but we know not the multiplied murders, the painful wounds, the desolating rapine, and the fierce crimes which attend the track of armies. If we saw battle with our own eyes, we should with burning fervor cry, “Send us peace in our days, good Lord.”

Moreover, he had not only seen war, but he sighed for peace, because *he was himself feeling the mischief of it.* The dread of the conflict had come to his mountain farm at Abiezer. There he was himself, threshing wheat by the wine press, in an unusual place, in an inconvenient place, that he might hide a little grain for winter’s food, from the Midianites who were eager to devour it. Ay, and when carnage smokes at your own door, and rapine is at your own gate, when you yourself are straitened and are hiding for fear, then comes from the deep recesses of the spirit the cry, “Oh, that God would send us

peace, for this is a weary oppression; these ravens and wolves utterly devour us.” Let us bow our heads and thank God that he has long blessed this favored isle with unbroken peace, and as an act of thankfulness to God let us set our faces against the war-spirit which so readily inflames our fellow countrymen.

The way of peace was sufficiently well known to Gideon, the prophet of the Lord had indicated to the people that the only way of peace was for Israel to return unto JEHOVAH, her God. The great sin of departure from the glorious living God was set before them, and they could readily draw the inference that they would never have peace from their enemies till first of all they had made their peace with God. They must surrender to their sovereign, and renew their loyalty, and then He would drive out the foe from their land. They must confess their transgressions and renew their covenant, and then they would obtain deliverance. Then would the ancient promise be fulfilled, “One should chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight.”

Gideon probably knew this before the prophet came, it was deeply imprinted on his thoughtful spirit, and as he was a man of faith in God, he did not doubt but that if Israel returned to JEHOVAH then peace would follow. Much is gained when we know this, if our knowledge leads to practical action.

While Gideon is meditating and working, an angel appears to him and *gives him the assurance that with him at least God was at peace*. The covenant angel said to him, “JEHOVAH is with you, you mighty man of valor.” I think his spirit ought greatly to have rejoiced at that assurance, and perhaps it did, for what better thing can happen to any man than to receive such a token for good? If God is for us, who can be against us? We know how sweet is the assurance that being justified by faith we have peace with God. It is well with us when we are assured that the

Lord is with us, our helper, our shield, our portion forever and ever.

But *there arose in his mind a grave anxiety*. His was a very careful, thoughtful soul, for he was a man of prudence, large-hearted, far-seeing, and given to look at things coolly and steadily, and there arose in his heart a question serious and vital, “Is this the voice of God to me, or am I deluded? Is God at peace with me, or am I like the rest, plunged in a horrible warfare against the living God?” Therefore he puts a question, and he asks a sign that he might make sure of what he was about.

Brethren, in spiritual matters you and I had need be sure. If we have peace within our spirit let us make certain that it is the peace of God, for still are there voices that cry, “Peace, peace,” where there is no peace. Still do siren songs still charm men to ruin with their dulcet notes, still does the fatal river flow most smoothly as it approaches the dreadful cataract. Beware of that word of the Lord, “When they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction comes upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.”

None are more quiet than the ungodly when they are given up to a strong delusion. The Psalmist says of them, “There are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.” Like liquor which has settled on its lees, the ungodly man’s carnal confidence seems clear and bright, the settling of conscious sin and consequent doubt in their case lies at the bottom undisturbed.

It was not so with Gideon, his anxiety made itself visible. He was not the man to leap at a shadow, he sought for substance. If he was to have peace, he must have it from God, if he was to be delivered, he longed to have victory plain and permanent. The favor which he asked was requested because anxiety troubled him, and he wished to make assurance doubly

sure. He desired to know from God Himself that his mission was authentic and his success certain. “Fast bind, fast find,” says the proverb, and this valiant man would have it so.

I believe that many of us have been, and perhaps are, in Gideon's position. Of course we have not his errand, but we have one of our own, and we are troubled because we are not personally sure of our peace. We are grieved by our past sins and their consequences. This is the lot of many men. The fowls which they have reared have come home to roost, they have been guilty in the past, and their sins have returned upon them, so that they are sore vexed. They have cried unto the Lord in their trouble, beseeching him to deliver them out of their distresses, and now a consciousness of sin is upon them, and they fear lest their prayers should be rejected.

Under the strokes of God's rod they smart, they feel their guilt more and more, they are sore afraid. “Conscience makes cowards of us all,” and when the mighty Spirit of God convicts us of sin then sin becomes a second sorrow, nay, worse than that, for if sorrow do chasten us with whips, sin does scourge us with scorpions. We are consumed by God's anger, and by His wrath we are troubled. His breaking waves go over us, and his billows swallow us up.

Still the heart keeps on crying after God if it is being operated upon by the Spirit of God. The mind is tossed to and fro and is confounded, but even in its confusion it seeks the true rest, and longs to gain peace in God. Like the needle in the compass, it is agitated and disturbed, yet still it knows its pole, and trembles towards it. It will never be still till it reaches the point of its rest. Have you ever been in that condition? I know you have if the Lord has loved you and ordained you to His work. Has God at such a time sent you a message of mercy? Have you searched the Scriptures and found a precious promise? Have you heard a faithful servant of God preach

under his Master's anointing, and have you been comforted? Even then I should not wonder if the darkening thought has arisen like a cloud, "Is this the right comfort for me? May I really enjoy it? Will it be presumption or assurance?" There is often a fine line, thin as a razor's edge, between the two, and woe unto him who makes a mistake about it.

O God, save us from carnal security. Prevent our crying, "Peace, peace, where there is no peace." Better that we write bitter things against ourselves, if they be true, than that we say smooth things and flatter ourselves to destruction. Therefore, I should not wonder if you are asking the Lord to give you a token for good. You are praying to Him and saying, "I will not be comforted except You comfort me: Your dove shall find no rest for the sole of her foot except it is in the ark with the true Noah, in whom is rest."

As for me, I will take no cup of consolation except that which Jesus proffers when He gives it me with His own pierced hands. If washed, it shall be in Jesus' blood, if clothed, it shall be in His righteousness. I will be hungry till I die sooner than eat anything but the bread of heaven. I will thirst till I faint and expire, but none shall give me to drink except of the water of the well of Bethlehem. Brethren, we must make sure work for eternity, we cannot afford to have a question on that matter. A note of interrogation here will be a note of alarm. It will be a thorn in our side.

I am sure that in the case of Gideon, if it be thus spiritually interpreted and set in gospel light, we may see ourselves. As though we looked into a glass we may say, "That portrait is my own."

II. From Gideon's longing, panting desire to obtain peace with God and then peace for his country we turn to look a little further into **GIDEON'S FEAR WHICH HE MET WITH IN THE WAY OF PEACE.**

“An angel” appeared to him—so says the text in the Authorized Version, but in truth it was *the* angel of JEHOVAH, and this should have comforted him, even as it has comforted us. Do we not sing,

“But if Immanuel’s face appear,
My hope, my joy begins;
His name forbids my slavish fear,
His grace removes my sins”?

One would have thought that Gideon would have leaped for joy when he beheld his God veiled in angelic form, but instead, the shadow of death fell upon him. Here was a man panting for peace, and firmly following the way of peace, and yet afraid with a deadly fear. Peace cannot be had except by our drawing near to God and the Lord’s drawing near to us, but as soon as this process commences poor humanity shrinks from the interview, and is melted with fear. “When Gideon perceived that He was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! For because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face.”

It usually happens that when God is bringing men into peace with Himself, while the operation is going on thoroughly and soundly, there is a degree of trembling in the soul. I suspect that conversion which has no trembling in it, note the prodigal’s cry, “I am not worthy to be called your son.” Note Peter’s bitter weeping, and the three days’ darkness of Saul of Tarsus. Even to believers the visitations of God are not without overwhelming awe, Jacob cries, “How dreadful is this place,” Job abhors himself, Moses does exceedingly fear and quake, and Isaiah cries, “Woe is me.”

Why was Gideon afraid? *Not because he was a coward*—you will scarcely meet with a braver man in all Scripture than this

son of Joash—but because even brave men are alarmed at the Supernatural. He saw something which he had never seen before, an appearance celestial, mysterious, above what is usually seen of mortal men, therefore, as he feared God, Gideon was afraid. When the living God draws very near to a soul, even though it be in the person of Christ Jesus, that soul is struck with awe, and trembles before the Lord. It cannot well be otherwise.

Recollect how it was with the beloved John. “When I saw Him,” says John—that was, his own dear Master, upon whose breast he had leaned his head—“when I,” the disciple whom Jesus loved, “saw *Him*, I fell at *His* feet as dead.” You do not wonder, therefore, if a poor soul full of doubt and anxiety, vexed with a sense of sin, and greatly troubled by affliction, is full of fear when Jesus draws near. Though He comes with no feeling but of love, no thought but of mercy, no sentence but of free forgiveness, yet the heart is awe-struck at the wondrous sight.

Alas, some of you know not what it is to have the Lord drawing near to your spirits. If you did you would not think it strange that certain awakened ones have acted in a singular way, and for a while have forgotten to eat bread. Daniel says, “I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength.” That great Lord who rules all things, whose voice divides the flames of fire, makes the hinds to calve, and discovers the deep recesses of the forest, is not to be discoursed with as an ordinary person, His presence overwhelms the finite mind. He looks on the earth and it trembles, He touches the hills and they smoke, the voice of His thunder is in the heavens, His lightnings lighten the world.

When this glorious God comes near to the soul it is a solemn visitation, and the mind is bowed under it. Well said

Habakkuk, “When I heard, my belly trembled, my lips quivered at the voice, rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble.” I marvel not that this mighty man of valor was grievously disturbed. Who among us would have been otherwise?

Moreover, *Gideon had been ill-taught by tradition*. There was a rumor abroad which was derived from truth, and yet was false, namely, that no man could see a heavenly being and live. It is true that the Lord expressly told His servant Moses that he could not see His face and live, but He did not say, “You cannot see an angel and live,” nor had He said, “You cannot see My veiled presence and live.” The tradition was an accretion to the truth and a corruption of it. We may not see the face of God, but we may see Jesus, in fact, we live because we see Him. Beware of the moss which grows upon a truth.

Many a heart bleeds because it is wounded by its own imperfect ideas of God, and so when God does draw near, when the great Almighty overshadows it, there is a slavish dread for which there is no need. “I shall die,” says he, “I shall die.” He sees his sin, and therefore he thinks that God has come in anger to punish him, he feels his weakness, and fainting under it he groans, “I shall die.” No, soul, if God had meant to slay you He would have left you alone.

Whom God destroys He first leaves to the madness of his own conceit. He does not take the trouble to show a man his sin, and reveal to him his transgression unless He means to pardon and save him. He lets the proud Pharisee remain as comely as he dreams himself to be, and allows him to glory in his own righteousness, and go on in his proud self-conceit, as for the chosen of the Lord, the Spirit of God blows upon their comeliness and withers it right away as the flower of the field. If the Lord has taken to strip you, He will clothe you; if He makes your righteousness to fade like the leaves of autumn, it

is because He has a glorious robe with which to array you, therefore be not afraid. Yet it is no marvel if you are cast down. We are such creatures of sight and feeling, that before the glory of the Lord we are encompassed with fears, and sickened with affright.

Besides, *Gideon was in a state of mind in which he could be easily cast down*. He was a brave man, but long affliction had cast a tinge of sadness over him. His usual conduct in life is well pictured by the two signs which God gave him. When all the people around him were with excitement, like the threshing floor, heated and dry, he, like the fleece, was cool and composed, and then, again, when all around him like the wet floor, were dampened with discouragement, he alone remained in his ordinary condition, with not a drop of cowardice within him. That was the kind of man, calm, quiet, determined, brave.

But at the moment recorded in our text he was smarting under a cruel oppression, conscious of God's anger for Israel's sin, and overshadowed by God's own presence, and therefore his mind was ready to rush from one fear to another. Only, see the beauty of it, that he always tells his fear to God, always goes to Him for comfort, and therefore always obtains succor.

The brave man is not he who sees no fear, but he who, seeing the danger, rises superior to it. Men who are boldest in the actual conflict are usually found among those who look seriously at the coming battle, and do not go to war with a light heart. These men count the cost, and so when they commit themselves to the conflict they know what they are at. Such was this man, tossed to and fro from one fear to another, but never tossed off from his God, and so always sure to right himself. And you, dear heart, if you are seeking after peace with God I should not wonder if fear follows fear, and yet no fear drives you from looking unto the Lord. It is but natural that you should be overawed, but oh, be not despairing, for there is the

surest reason for hope. Still look to Jesus, and He will surely in His due time send you a blessed deliverance.

One thing is noteworthy, namely, that *Gideon's greatest fear arose out of a sign which he had himself asked for*. He said, "Show me a sign," and when he had that sign, namely, God's coming to him, then it was that he was afraid. Be very chary how you ask for signs, for they may work your discouragement rather than your comfort. I have known some say, "I shall not believe I am a child of God unless I feel a deep sense of sin," and when they have entered into that feeling, they have exclaimed, "I will never again ask for this."

I have heard of others who thought they could come to Christ if they were gently drawn, and the Lord has been gently drawing them, and then they have wished that they had been more troubled and distressed. They imagine that they could have believed more readily had their despair been greater—a strange notion certainly. The fact is, we are prone to unbelief, this noxious weed grows without sowing, and only the sweet love of Jesus can teach us how to believe. We are ever busy in manufacturing fresh doubts, and for raw material we use the very tokens for which we so earnestly besought the Lord. We cry aloud, "Show me a token for good," and when the token is given we are amazed at being heard, and fall to fearing more sadly than before. Therefore pray for such boons with bated breath, and say twice over concerning such things, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

All this while, beloved friends, *Gideon had one truth before him which ought to have prevented all his fears*, for the Lord had spoken to him, and said, "Go, in this your might, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent you?" See, he goes home fearing that he will die, and yet that could not be. How could he die if he was to deliver Israel? he must

be a live man to do that, and yet, you see, he forgets to reason for his own comfort, but takes care to argue for his fears.

Have I never seen my hearers doing this? I have often caught myself at it—refusing to use my logic for the strengthening of my faith, but perverting reason in order to assist my unbelief. Is not this foolish and wicked? We sharpen the knives with which to cut ourselves, we nurture in our bosom the viper which will bite us, we stuff our pillows with thorns, and fill our cups with wormwood, and all to no purpose but the increase of despondency. Too often we are industrious in the fabrication of discomfort, and utterly idle in the search for joy. This is folly, and yet better men than we are have fallen into this fault. The Lord save us from it.

In drawing near to God is our peace, and if in that process a sense of the presence of God casts us down and creates a more poignant sorrow than we had at the first, let us not therefore shrink from the process, but push on with all our might. As our safety lies in coming to God, to Him we must approach at all hazards. If He seems to stand before us with a drawn sword in His hand let us run upon the point of it. If even our God be a consuming fire let us still draw near to Him, for this is indeed the high privilege of saints.

“Our God,” that is our God in Christ Jesus, “is a consuming fire.” Who, then, shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who shall dwell with everlasting burnings? When this question is quoted it is usually referred to the burning of hell. The error is glaring. For the Scriptural answer to the question shows that it is not so. “He that walks righteously and speaks uprightly”—he it is that dwells on high with the Lord God. He is the man that can live in the fire, for he is genuine metal. He has the pure heart, and shall see God, and live. That sweet singer of the sanctuary, Miss Havergal, beautifully writes —

*“They say there is a hollow, safe and still,
A point of coolness and repose
Within the center of a flame, where life might dwell
Unharm’d and unconsum’d, as in a luminous shell,*

*Which the bright walls of fire enclose
In breachless splendor, barrier that no foes
Could pass at will. There is a point of rest
At the great center of the cyclone’s force,*

*A silence at its secret source —
A little child might slumber undistress’d,
Without the ruffle of one fairy curl,
In that strange central calm amid the mighty whirl.*

*So, in the center of these thoughts of God,
Cyclones of power, consuming glory-fire —
As we fall o’eraw’d
Upon our faces, and are lifted higher
By His great gentleness, and carried nigher
Than unredeem’d angels, till we stand
Even in the hollow of His hand —*

*Nay, more! We lean upon His breast —
There, there we find a point of perfect rest
And glorious safety.”*

So dwell we in the heart of God, who is a wall of fire round about us, and the glory in our midst. He who shall have had everything burnt up within him that can burn, shall find in the presence of God the element of his life. Oh, the splendor of the life of faith! God bring us fully into it. Thus I have spoken of Gideon’s fear while he was in the path of peace.

III. Now let us spend a few minutes in considering **GOD'S COMFORT OF HIS SERVANT.**

“The LORD said unto him, *Shalom*—peace be unto you; fear not: you shall not die.” The Lord would not have His Gideons disturbed in mind. If we are to trouble the enemy, we must not be troubled ourselves. “Comfort you, comfort you my people, says your God. Speak you comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.” This is how God would have His prophets speak, and this is how He speaks Himself. He wants His workers to be full of comfort while they labor.

Notice brethren, *the great power of God in speaking home the truth*. Suppose I salute you with, “Brethren, peace be to you.” That would be a sweet word, but when the Lord says it, you feel the peace itself. Suppose Peter had stood up in that barque which was tossed upon the Galilean Lake, and had said to the waves, “Be still,” The waves would not have taken much notice of him, and the whistling blast would have defied him, but when Jesus said, “Peace, be still,” the rampant lions of the sea crouched at His feet, and there was a great calm. Oh, that the great Master’s voice would sound the requiem of trouble in every tempest driven heart by saying, “Peace be unto you,” so that you may become perfectly restful in your God.

“Peace!” The word is *shalom*, the word which Gideon borrowed and applied to the altar which he raised in obedience to the Lord’s bidding. It signifies not only quiet, but prosperity, success, “good fortune,” as the multitudes say. When God spoke that word home to His dear servant’s heart, a great joy was born within him to prepare him for his great warfare. The Lord also cheered him with, “Fear not.” Oh, that charming word, as full as it is short—“Fear not.” It is the death knell of fear, the life of hope. If we once hear it as God’s fiat in our soul it makes us leap over a wall or break through a troop. Doubts

and fears flee away like specters of the night when the sun arises. “Fear not.” What is there to fear? If God is with you, of whom can you be afraid? Gideon feared himself, dreaded his own unfitness and unworthiness, feared in the awful presence of God, but the Lord said, “Fear not,” and Gideon’s heart grew calm.

Then the Lord added, “You shall not die,” thus meeting the special form of his dread. This is what the Lord says to every poor trembler who is holding to Him by the desperate grip of faith—“You shall not die. You shall not die the second death, you have no sin to die for, for I have laid your transgressions on my only-begotten Son, you shall not die, for Jesus died. Your spiritual life cannot expire, for your ‘life is hid with Christ in God,’ and because Jesus lives you shall live also.”

When JEHOVAH speaks to comfort His people they are comforted indeed, and I pray Him this morning so to speak to any of you who wish to enjoy perfect peace. May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds by Christ Jesus. May you walk down those aisles saying, “Yes, I have peace with God, I have no fear now, I shall never die, for Jesus says, ‘He that lives and believes in me shall never die.’” What a morning without clouds will this be to your souls.

IV. Let us now look at **GIDEON’S MEMORIAL**.

His fears being banished, and being at perfect peace, *Gideon now goes to work*. Are any of you questioning whether you are saved or not? Do not go out preaching yet, for you may, perhaps, put others into bondage. Are any of you half afraid that you are not at peace with God? Be careful what you do! Strive after peace, lest you weaken your testimony.

I recollect the lesson which I learned from my Sunday school class, I was taught, if the other boys were not. Though yet a youth, I was teaching the Gospel to boys, and I said, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” One of them asked

somewhat earnestly, “Teacher, are you saved?” I answered, “I hope so.” The boy replied, “Teacher, don’t you know?” As if he had been sent to push the matter home to me, he further inquired, “Teacher, have you believed?” I said, “Yes.” “Have you been baptized?” I said, “Yes.” “Well, then,” he argued, “you are saved.” I was happy to answer, “Yes, I am,” but I had hardly dared to say that before.

I found that if I had to teach other people the truth, I must know and believe its sweet result upon myself. I believe, dear friends, that you will seldom comfort others except it be by the comfort with which you yourself are comforted of God. Look at certain of our brethren who preach and have no conversions. What is the reason in some cases? Is it not that they fish all the week for frogs to feed the people with, and people do not care to receive such food?

I mean this. If some new doubt is hatched, if some philosopher thinks he has found out a flaw in the Gospel, next Sunday these worthies discourse upon it, for they think every new query must be answered. As for me, I do not care a fig what all the philosophers find out, for they cannot disprove the facts of my experience. When I come across a fresh piece of infidelity I do not hurry to proclaim it to you, and so do the devil’s advertising for nothing.

Let others follow their business, if it be their business, as for me, my business is to preach the truth of God which I have learned from His infallible word by the teaching of His Spirit. God would have His people be at peace with Him, and know that they are so, for if they are fretted within, and worried in reference to their God, how can they fight the battles of life?

When Gideon is fully at peace, what does he begin to do for God? If God loves you, He will use you either for suffering or service, and if He has given you peace you must now prepare for war. Will you think me odd if I say that our Lord came to

give us peace that He might send us out to war? Gideon's first work was to go and *cut down his father's sacred grove*, which stood on the top of the hill, and enclosed an altar to Baal. He could not effect this business by day, because the foolish worshippers would have rallied to the defense of their dumb idol, and have overpowered the reformer, therefore with his ten men he performed the work by night.

I think I see him and his people in the dim darkness, with their axes and saws, doing the work as quietly as they can, felling all those trees. A splendid clearance was made that night. "Now," he cries, "over with that detestable altar to Baal."

Some people would have said, "Spare it as a fine piece of antiquity." Yes, and leave it to be used again! I say, down with it, for the older it is the more sin it has caused, and the more likely is it that it will be venerated again. I often wish the reformers had been more thorough in their destruction of idolatrous images and Popish trumpery. In many a parish church of this land, everything is ready for the restoration of the Roman idolatry. The nests were not half pulled down, and the rooks are likely to be back again. Many a window, full of saints the Bible never knew, only waits for the martyr burners to be back again. Gideon cast down every stone, and it was bravely done.

But see, by the Lord's bidding *he piles a new altar of earth*, or unhewn stone, and when that is done, he fetches his father's bullock and slays it for a sacrifice. How steadily they went about this reestablishment of the pure faith! See, they use the wood of the grove for burning the sacrifice, and the heavens are red with the blaze. I think I hear the gallant leader say, "Let them wake now; they cannot prevent our worshiping the Most High, nor can they cause the grove to grow again. By yon beacon-fire Israel shall gather together to fight against Midian and victory shall be ours." Beloved, if God has given you peace, go home

and begin your reform. I would preach up the overthrow of every sin. Down with every idol. Have you one left? Over with it, and present a sacrifice to God. Every true Christian should pass a reform bill at home, and carry it out.

“The dearest idol I have known,
Whate’er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from its throne,
And worship only thee.”

But to pull down is not enough. Plenty of people can do that. Gideon, as we have seen, builds an altar to JEHOVAH. When you are at perfect peace with God, think what you can do for Him, think of a new plan of work, or consider how to do the old work better, advance any part of divine truth that has been forgotten, any ordinance that has been neglected, and any virtue that has been despised. Especially make prominent Christ Jesus, the altar and sacrifice so dear to God. Now that you have begun the fight by cutting down Baal’s grove, complete it by building an altar for the Lord. Instead of a fortress and high tower, declare the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, and hold that fort till he shall come.

When he had built his altar *he called it “JEHOVAH-shalom,”* which was done by way of thanksgiving for peace received. The inscription declares that “JEHOVAH is our peace.” Blessed be His name this day. We have entered on the battles of peace, for the Lord God is with us, and with His people we will go forth to win the peace which He has promised. It was a psalm in two words, it was a song of one verse, infinitely sweet, “JEHOVAH-shalom,” the Lord our peace.

Moreover, it was a prayer, as the margin puts it—“JEHOVAH, send peace.” If you have peace with God, let your next prayer be, “Lord, give peace to all Your people.” “Pray for

the peace of Jerusalem.” Work it, O Holy Spirit of peace! Then ask for peace by conquest of an ungodly world for Jesus till the first Christmas carol shall be sung again, “Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, goodwill toward men.”

See, brethren, and with that I finish, there may sit here this morning a young man who does not know what God is going to make of him. The capacities of service that God can infuse into a single individual are marvelous. At present you are disturbed in mind, afflicted in heart, ill at ease, you need perfect peace, but you have not found it yet. Rest not till you have it. At God's own altar, where Jesus died, you will find it, and only there. Where Jesus' blood makes peace with God there is your peace. Rest not till you are assuredly at peace with the Lord of all, so that your soul lies down in green pastures, and is led by the still waters. I desire that down in the deepest caverns of your nature there may reign a profound calm which nothing can disturb. Then may the Spirit of God come upon you, and may you sound the trumpet for the battles of the Lord. Oh for the valor which will smite everything that is sinful, and will root out everything that is erroneous. “The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon” is our watchword. As our Master was sent to destroy the works of the devil, even so we do bear the same commission, using only his weapons—love, truth, and self-sacrifice.

1680 THE WEEPERS – JUDGES 2:4-5

A Sermon
Delivered on Thursday Evening, August 10, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

And it came to pass, when the angel of the LORD spoke these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto the LORD. — Judges 2:4-5

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Judges 2]

LET ME GIVE an outline of the chapter, that we may put the text into its proper setting.

God had brought His people out of Egypt, and divided Jordan that they might march through, dry-shod into the land which He had promised to their fathers. He charged them to drive out the Canaanites, a race that had become so loathsome in God's sight that He decreed their destruction, and appointed the tribes of Israel to be their executioners. It was for the good of the universal world that this pest-house should be broken up, and that the filthy races should be destroyed, and God gave His people that charge to carry out. Those who quarrel with this arrangement should remember that this is not the only instance of aboriginal tribes being driven out by a superior race. Our Anglo-Saxon nation drove out the original inhabitants of this island, who survived only in the mountains of Wales and

Cornwall, and in the highlands of Scotland. It certainly will not be wise on our part as Anglo-Saxons, to condemn Israel for doing under divine command, what our forefathers did for their own aggrandizement. Alas, in more modern times lands have been seized and nations extirpated by the white man without divine warrant or reasonable excuse. We do not justify all this, but if any complain of Israel for obeying the sentence of God, let them first raise their voices against the driving out of ancient races by colonists of our own race.

The order to slay the Canaanites had a second objective, namely, that Israel might dwell alone in the land, and might keep themselves to themselves—the great nonconformists of the universe—separated from all the rest of mankind both by residence and by manners, not following the customs of the nations round about them, or falling into their sins. That they might be sanctified they were to be separated. “The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.” Now, mark and note right well that it is an evil thing, under any pretext whatever, to depart in any degree from the commandment of the Most High God. Whatever may be the law which God gives, either to the whole race or to His chosen, they will find their safety in keeping close to it. But Israel forgot this. Soldiering was hard work—storming cities and warring with men who attacked them with chariots of iron was heroic service. All this required strong faith and untiring perseverance, and in these virtues the Israelites were greatly deficient. And so in certain places, they said to the Canaanites, “Let us be neighbors. Let us dwell together.” They thought, perhaps, that they had abundant reason for this easy mode of ending the dispute, for those who would correct infallible wisdom have usually a great deal to say for themselves.

Certain persons thought in those days that the religious notion of God's requirements was too severe, that He was,

after all, a mass of mercy, and that the best thing that they could do was to be kindly tolerant of these Canaanites and make the best terms they could with them. They said that perhaps, after all, it was a pity to be so old-fashioned and so rigid in carrying out the divine order, and it would be better to learn something of the civilization of the Canaanites, something of their arts and sciences, something of their theory of religion, for men ought to have liberal views, and believe that there is latent truth in all forms of worship. At any rate, it could do no harm to study their archaeology, and go to their temples and see the gods they worshipped, and get a general acquaintance with the advanced thought of the period, for the Canaanites were a greatly advanced people, they were the advanced thinkers of the period. They had thought out he-gods and she-gods, Baal and Ashtaroath, and their lesser deities were many. They were, in fact, a highly cultured people, always thinking out something fresh. So Israel said, "It was a pity to carry out the divine denunciation quite to the letter. Let us tone it down. There are many things to be learned from these people. No doubt they have their fine points, and we must not be too hard upon their imperfections. Therefore let us enter into treaties with them and live with them." They did live with them, and fell into their ways. Tolerance led to imitation, and Israel became as vile as the heathen, whom the Lord had condemned, and the Israelites became a mixed race, in whose veins, there flowed a measure of Canaanite blood.

Yes, if you depart from God's word by a hair's breadth, you know not where you will end. It needs but a little to degrade the Christian into a Ritualist, and still less to turn the Ritualist into a Romanist. We shall go far if we once start on the downhill road. I would to God that in these degenerate times we had back again somewhat of the stern spirit of the Cameroonians and the Covenanters, for now men play fast and

loose with God, and think that anything they please to do will satisfy the Most High. The waste and the refuse will suffice for sacrifices for Him. But as to strict obedience to His word, they can by no means abide it. Mischief will surely come of this lax state of things to the churches of this day as surely as affliction came abundantly to Israel of old.

Note, next, that whenever one sin is allowed, we may say of it, “Gad, a troop comes.” It seemed a pardonable sort of sin to be gentle to these people and not to obey God’s severer word, but then what came next? Why, soon they, the children of Jehovah, were found worshipping before the horrible Baal. Soon they had gone farther and the unclean goddess Ashtaroth became their delight, and soon they forgot Jehovah altogether amid their deities and demons. With these errors in religion there had come in all sorts of errors in morals, for every fashion of immorality and lewdness defiled the worshippers of Baal-Peer, Baal-Berith and Baal-Zebub, and the chosen people of God could scarcely be distinguished from the heathen nations among which they dwelt, or if distinguished at all, it was by their greater sin, inasmuch as they were transgressing against superior light and holding down their consciences which God had rendered by His teaching much more tender than the consciences of those about them.

I said before that if you turn aside from God’s words by a hair’s breadth you know not where it will end. The rail diverges but a little where the switches are turned, but before long the branch line is miles away from the main track. Backslide a little and you are on the way to utter apostasy. The mother of mischief is small as a gnat’s egg, hatch it and you shall see an evil bird larger than an ostrich. The least wrong has in it an all but infinity of evil. You cannot say to sin, “Up to here shall you go, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed.” Like the sea when the dyke is broken, it stretches forth its hand

to grasp all the surrounding country. The beginning of sin is like the beginning of strife, and that is said to be as the letting out of water, no man knows what a flood may come when once the banks are burst. So Israel went aside farther and farther from God because they regarded not their way, and did not in all things obey the Lord.

But then comes in a truth which, though it may seem black in the telling, is bright in the essence of it. God did not leave His people without chastisement. Had He left them alone, to be given up to their idols, their case would have been hopeless. For mercy's sake they must be punished for their transgression, but this was a gracious punishment, that they might not lie and wallow in their transgression and become altogether like the swinish nations that surrounded them. God began to punish them by their own sin. He suffered the Canaanite nations to grow strong, so that they grievously oppressed Israel. He put the Israelites under the yoke of those nations which they ought to have utterly destroyed. If they would not be conquerors they would be conquered. If they would not lead captivity captive, they should be led captives themselves. The Lord laid His blows upon them thick and heavy. But, before He did this, He sent a messenger to rebuke them. It is always the Lord's way to give space for repentance before He executes vengeance.

The axes which were carried before the Roman magistrates by the lictors were bound up in bundles of rods. It is said that when a prisoner was before the magistrate, the lictor began to untie the rods and with these the culprit was beaten, meanwhile the judge looked in the prisoner's face and heard his defense, and if he saw reason for averting the capital sentence because of the repentance which the offender expressed, then he only smote him with the rod, but the axe remained unused. But if, when every rod was taken out, the culprit was still hardened and the crime was a capital one and clearly proven, then the axe

was used, and used all the more sternly because space had been given for repentance, and the rods had been used in vain. When the rod is despised, the axe is ready. It is certainly so with God, He waits to be gracious, but when patience cannot hope for penitence, then justice takes her turn, and her stroke is terrible.

The Lord on this occasion commissioned a special messenger to rebuke these people, for He sent an angel. I leave it to your own judgments to discover who this angel was, if it is discoverable. It may have been an ordinary angel, but I think it must have been *the* angel of the Lord. He is so styled in the fourth verse, and besides, He uses language which an ordinary angel could not have used. He begins, "I made you go up out of Egypt." Note, He does not say that the Lord said this or that, but the angel Himself says it—"I made you go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers." Who could this have been, then, but that covenant angel who, on other occasions, appeared to holy men, and who on this occasion preached a sermon to the assembled multitude at Shiloh? My brethren, you know that our Lord was here among men many a time before He came in mortal flesh to suffer and to die. He was here "rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth, and His delights were with the sons of men." He was with Abraham under the tree, with Jacob at Jabbok, with Joshua by the walls of Jericho, with Gideon at the threshing floor, and with the three holy children in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. Not in such a body as God had prepared for Him when He took upon Himself the form of a servant, but in such a form and fashion as seemed most congruous to His divine majesty, and to the circumstances of those He visited. This angel of the divine covenant, whom we delight in, came and spoke to this people. Such is the judgment of many who have thought most upon it, but I leave it to you to decide.

At any rate, it must have been grand hearing to hear an angel preach, and grander hearing still, to hear *the* angel of the covenant plead with the covenanted ones. Oh, what a sermon! What a sermon it must have been! Scarcely was such a preacher seen on earth. And yet that sermon did not do as much good as when the seafaring man, Peter, preached at Pentecost. The sermon at Bochim, if I were to sum up its results, ended in disappointment. When our adorable Christ Himself preached to the men of Nazareth, they would have cast Him headlong from the brow of the hill, so that all His eloquent words had fallen upon dead ears, and no good result had come even from *His* instruction. Be not disappointed, servant of God, if sometimes you seem to fail. Do not say, “I will give it up.” Your bread has been cast upon the waters. Wait a while, for after many days you may find it. If Israel is not gathered, God will reward you for your toil. It is yours to labor, it is God’s to give the results, and He does not always grant pleasing results to us at once. He did not allot great triumphs to this angel of the Lord, as we shall have to show you. It was a great congregation. It was a great preacher, and it was a great sermon, and yet there was not a great ingathering. Read the sermon through and note that though it is a short one, it is all the greater for its brevity. Sermons may grow little by being long, and a sermon may be great through being short, if it is big with thought as this angelic sermon was.

He began first by telling them what *mercies they had received*. Read the chapter. “I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers.” Brethren, this subject should most readily lead us to repentance—that God should have dealt so well with us should make us grieve that we have behaved so badly to Him. Do I address a backsliding child of God? I do not think that any exercise is more likely to benefit your heart than to remember

what God did for you in years gone by. He took you up out of the horrible pit and out of the miry clay and set your feet upon a rock. He brought you out from the iron bondage of your despair and gave you liberty. He broke the yoke of sinful habits and the chains of furious passions, and now are you wandering away from Him? Are you making something else to be the god of your spirit? If so, be ashamed of your ingratitude, and let this first head of the angel's discourse have power upon your mind. "You use no other friend so ill," and yet you have not a friend who can be compared with your God. "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice" unto your God, and sin no longer against Him.

Then the angel passed on to mention the *mercies guaranteed to them*, "I said, I will never break My covenant with you." Oh, that is a blessed theme. If indeed you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord has pledged Himself to make you perfect and to bring you home to Himself with exceedingly great joy. You shall not perish. Christ has said, "I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them to Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand." You see the two hands—one inside the other and you are in the middle one, enclosed within the palm of omnipotent faithfulness. Jehovah says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love." He will never break His covenant with you. Will you wander away from Him who passes by your iniquity, transgression, and sin, and does not let His anger smoke against you forever—He to whom you are joined in an everlasting wedlock which shall never know a divorce? Oh, cruel heart! Cruel heart! Can you offend against such love as this? Can you break with God when He declares that He will never break with you? The angel pleads this longsuffering, eternally-enduring love, and pleads it well. I know of no two

greater arguments than mercy received and mercy promised. Let us not sin against these. May the Holy Spirit hold us fast with these cords of love.

And then the angel came to close grips with them, and said, “You shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; you shall throw down their altars; but you have not obeyed My voice: why have you done this?” *He came to their sin.* He put His finger on their failure, their omission and their commission. He did not flinch from stating to them exactly what their transgression was, nor from demanding, “Why have you done this?” And oh, surely, this shall help to lead us to repentance when God “sets our iniquities before Him; our secret sins in the light of His countenance.” When we see our sin, we ought to be distressed by it and to flee from it, “hot foot,” as men say, and be clean rid of it once and for all. Oh, may the Spirit of God convince any wandering one here of sin, and may he then turn to God with a penitent heart. The angel expostulated in most chosen words, saying, “Why have you done this?” Why have you turned away from God? Why have you let your own enemies multiply upon you? Why have you been disobedient to the command which was given to you so positively? Know you not that he is cursed that does the work of the Lord deceitfully? You have acted disobediently, and you have brought upon yourselves a terrible retribution, but why have you done this? Backslider, are you here tonight? Have you gone aside from church fellowship and left the profession of religion? Why have you done this? Can you mention a reason which will bear the light? We know you cannot. There is no sense in sin, no justification for iniquity. Ungodliness is madness. Irreligion is irrational. Disobedience to God is a breach of every law of common sense and logic. In God’s creation it is unreasonable, unnatural, and monstrous for the creature to rebel against the

Creator. Why have you done this? “Turn you, turn you; why will you die, O house of Israel?”

Then the angel completed His discourse by declaring to them that *further chastisements would surely follow*. He was not sent to preach the gospel, and therefore mercy is not His theme. He was sent to preach the law and He did preach it. Listen to the judgment which He denounces—“Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be your ruin”—so some read the passage. It was a just but terrible threat that He thus thundered in their ears. Notice it. They were to be punished by their own sin. The Lord as good as said—“You would not drive them out, and now I will not drive them out. Your negligence and time-serving shall come home to you and place thorns in your suffering flesh. Your omission shall sting you where you will feel it. You have sowed thistles, and thorns shall stuff your pillows.”

Then, next, He tells them how sharp and keen this sin should be to them. “They shall be as thorns in your sides,” pricking you in one of the most tender parts—in the very region of life itself. Wherever you turn, these sins of yours—these enemies that you spared—shall prick you in the side, and their gods shall be your ruin. You dote upon their false deities, and think them your glory, but they shall be your dishonor. The heathen may trust in them, but you shall not be able to do so. They shall be a snare and a mischief to you.

What a sermon that was! As I have said, there was a great occasion, a great congregation, a great preacher, a great sermon, and as far as one could see on the spot, a great movement produced.

Now I want you to notice what looks like a great result, and we shall talk of it under two heads. The people, when they

heard this solemn discourse, lifted up their voice and wept, yet they continued as they were. *How hopeful! How disappointing!*

I. First, HOW HOPEFUL. One could not desire anything better, apparently, than this. *They were all attentive hearers.* There was not one that looked about him, or that forgot the pointed words that were spoken. They all seemed to open their ears wide, and take in the divine admonition. There they stood before the Lord, all of them amazed and confounded, while the angel delivered His solemn message, and then returned to Him that sent Him. It is a great thing to win people's attention, and it is not everyone that can do it, for there are congregations that act as if the word had nothing to do with them, leaving the poor preacher to prophesy to dead walls. These Israelites took the warning and drank in the truth. They were attentive hearers, and anybody would have said, "Blessed be God, that sermon has done a great work. Blessed be God for such an attentive congregation. The nails are fastened in a sure place."

Moreover, *they were very feeling people*, for they felt what they heard. What would you think tonight if the congregation should suddenly cry out? "They lifted up their voice and wept"—wept aloud. Orientals, you know, are generally louder in their demonstrations than we are of a chillier climate, but still it must have been a solemn sight to notice men and women together, loudly lamenting their transgressions. I have no doubt that many who were there at that time were right with God and said, "What a wonderful opportunity! Glory be to God for such a revival! That one sermon has stirred the people through and through. Thank God that He has sent such a messenger with so fitting a message, and blessed it so, for certainly these people are all converted, otherwise they would not cry out and weep."

They were all sorrowful hearers as well as attentive and feeling hearers. Out of the whole company there was not one that laughed, not one that was indifferent, not one who scorned and

disregarded the message, but as far as the text goes, the statement is that all unanimously lifted up their voice and wept. Heaviness was upon them. Their souls were exceedingly sorrowful. They expressed their sorrow in a great and bitter cry, and meanwhile their tears flowed abundantly, even as when the rock was smitten in the desert and the waters gushed forth. They were all turned into weepers, and they called the name of that place Bochim, or the place of weepers. You would think, “Surely this is full of promise—every eye is filled with tears as they stand before God.” Alas that, such drops did not precede a shower of grace, but passed away as the morning cloud.

Yes, and *they all became professing hearers*, for as soon as ever that service was over they held another, and “They sacrificed unto Jehovah.” They avowed themselves to be Jehovah’s servants, and they took the sacrifice which He had appointed and offered it for their sin, and outwardly they all of them, became ardent worshippers of the Most High, and true penitents.

Well, dear friends, all this looks very hopeful, because it is what we may expect when God presses home the law upon the consciences of men. When sin is laid before a man, should he not weep? Hope glitters in every tear. Oh, that, men were sane enough to weep for their transgressions! I am wonder that some of you can read your Bibles with dry eyes. Unsaved, and rejecting the Savior, can you read the four evangelists without weeping? That Savior whom the Jews crucified you reject, and so, in fact, you crucify Him too. Can you read the ten commandments without an aching heart? You know that these are ten great pieces of artillery, all aimed at you for your destruction, since you have offended God by the breach of His law. Why, surely, you ought scarcely to sleep at night, lest God’s mighty judgment should fall upon your guilty heads while you are asleep. It is not amazing at all that people should cry out

and weep. The wonder is that every sanctuary where the law is preached, and where the gospel is preached, should not become a Bochim, or a place of weepers.

Oftentimes this deep emotion does come with true conversion—often, though not always, as I shall have to show you. Men convinced of sin may well weep. I have seen a strong man weep under a sense of his guilt—weep as though the fountains of his eyes would be exhausted, and the eyes themselves would turn to coals of fire. Frequently people are unable to restrain themselves, and break out even in the midst of the congregation, and cry to God for mercy. It is not amazing. It is what we should expect. It is not undesirable, for it is an effect which frequently accompanies real conversion to God. It may well go with sorrow for sin, and sorrow for sin is essential to eternal life. Repentance is an old-fashioned doctrine, which in these days has been despised, but if I stand alone, I will bear testimony for it. They say that repentance is nothing at all—that it is merely, according to the Greek, a change of mind. That shows what little Greek they know. A little of such knowledge is a dangerous thing. It is a pity that they do not learn more. Repentance is a change of mind, but do you say that it is *only* a change of mind? That is a pretty big, “only.” A change of mind, a radical change of mind, from the love of sin to the love of holiness, is that a small affair? It is always attended with sorrow and regret for past sin, and if there is a man here who thinks that he will get to heaven by a dry-eyed faith, he will be mistaken. He that never mourned for sin has never rejoiced in the Lord. If I can look back upon my past life of sin and say, “I have no grief over it,” why, then I should do the same again if I had the opportunity. And this shows that my heart is as perverse as ever it was, and I am still unregenerate. Dear Mr. Rowland Hill used to say that faith and repentance were his daily companions as long as he lived, and that, if he

had any thought of regret at entering heaven, it would be to think that he might have to part with his dear friend Repentance as he went through the gate. Godly sorrow is a blessed grief. Let no man speak evil of it. “Repent, and be converted” is as much the gospel as “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,” and it is not to be omitted in our preaching at the hazard of doing damage to men’s souls. He who has experienced holy sorrow for sin will continue to feel it. I should wonder if he did not often pull up the sluices and let his soul flow in a flood of loving regret—

“If tears of sorrow would suffice
To pay the debt I owe,
Tears should from both my weeping eyes
In ceaseless torrents flow.”

A weeper in that sense, always repenting, is also always growing in grace. So this place Bochim looks extremely hopeful, does it not?

II. Now let me turn to the other side, and show you that there was nothing permanently good in Bochim’s sudden water floods. These people were made weepers through hearing the angel’s sermon, but their weeping was **VERY DISAPPOINTING**. I half suspect that their tears and lamentations were *produced as much by the preacher’s person as by anything else*. It was the angel of the Lord, and who would not be moved at His presence? God gifts certain speakers with the power of moving the natural feelings, and that gift abundantly rested upon the covenant messenger. Some men so preach that it were almost impossible to remain unsoftened. There is pathos about them, or there is an earnestness so intense, so manifest, that for the heart of the hearer to be touched is a natural consequence. Now, I dread lest any of you should be so moved by me when I preach, that

your feeling should arise from my tone or mannerism, or because you have affection or esteem for me, for be sure of this, that which comes to you from a man will come to an end before long. A temporary cause cannot produce an everlasting change. “You must be born again;” not of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but by the Spirit of God. Everything about the preacher’s choice words, or musical tone, though proper enough as an accessory, if it becomes the principle and the power that moves you, will end in failure. That which begins with wind will end with whirlwind. That which comes of words will evaporate in words by and by. It may be a great blessing to you to hear a very useful preacher, but if you depend upon him in the least, it will be mischievous to you. Go and hear the gospel from any of my Master’s servants, and never depend in the least upon any one man, whoever he may be. Seek that your repentance may be a repentance which is worked by the Spirit of God in your heart and conscience, for if it is not so, it will one day curdle into greater depravity. Sham religion is an injury rather than a benefit. I suggest to you that you ask your heart many a question, and catechize it after the manner of Beddome’s hymn—

“Why, O my soul! Why do you weep?

Tell me from where arise

Those briny tears that often flow,

Those groans that pierce the skies.

Is sin the cause of your complaint,

Or the chastising rod?

Do you an evil heart lament,

And mourn an absent God?

Lord, let me weep for nothing but sin,
And after none but Thee.
And then I would—oh, that I might
A constant weeper be.”

Again, I am afraid that the repentance of these people *had a great deal to do with their natural softness*. They were tender and excitable because there was little grit in their nature; their manliness was of a degenerate type. They feared to go to battle for God, they dreaded the noise and the slaughter. They were moreover easily moved by their fellow men, and took shape from those who lived near them. They went to worship Baal because their neighbors said, “Come and worship Baal.” And they worshipped Ashtaroath because their friends said, “Come, let us reverence the goddess.” They were malleable, pliable, and ductile. We have numbers around us of that kind. What shall I call them—men of wax, creatures of India-rubber? They go to be shaped even by your finger, like clay upon the potter’s wheel, not yet hardened in the fire. No one knows what their shape will be when they leave the wheel. Some have been here for many years and have often been moved and molded by the preacher, and yet they are not saved. While stout-hearted rebels have stood in the aisles with half a sneer, and God has brought the hammer down upon their flinty hearts, broken them to pieces and now they are saved by mighty grace and rejoice in the Lord. Some have a natural tenderness which hinders the attainment of spiritual softness. Now, mark you, that which is natural may be used by God, towards that which is spiritual, but still it is not in itself spiritual. All that readiness to cry, all that readiness to receive the word with joy and to leap at once into faith may be nothing but mental weakness. Some men weep profusely because they have been drunk, and that gives them a drop in their eye, this is a miserable business. I like the

strong man who cries within, and is weary of the visible rain showers. I know really tender-hearted men who could not shed a tear for their lives, but feel a far deeper anguish than those whose griefs are shallow and watery. It is very beautiful to talk of the tears streaming down their faces, but many converts have never shed a tear, and perhaps never will. But this does not prove that they are not converted, far from it, the tear is but a natural drop of moisture and soon evaporates. The better thing is the inward torrent of grief within the soul, which leaves an indelible mark within. You know how we sang just now—

“Tears, though flowing like a river,
Never can one sin erase;
Jesus’ tears would not avail you,
Blood, alone, can meet your case;
Fly to Jesus!
Life is found in His embrace.”

One grain of faith is better than a gallon of tears. A drop of genuine repentance is more precious than a torrent of weeping.

There is another thing about the weeping of these people, and that is, that it was *caused a great deal by threats of punishment*. I am afraid that they did not weep because they sinned, but they wept because God said that He would not drive out any more Canaanites. They wished to conquer more of them—more of the most disreputable sort—but they did not wish to drive them all out. Yet they mourned because those whom they had spared would now get the upper hand of them. The more comfortable sort of Canaanites they were willing to save alive, and when they found that they were to have them for thorns in their sides, then they brought out their handkerchiefs, for there was reason for selfish grief. Yes, and you may preach the fires of hell till men are willing to abandon darling lusts of the more

glaring sort. To such we would put searching questions. Is there any holy salt in your tears? Is it sin that you weep for? Is it sin that you repent of? Every murderer repents at the gallows they say, that is, he repents of being hanged, but he does not repent of having killed others. He might do the same thing again if he had the opportunity. We ought clearly to discern between the natural terrors that come of vivid descriptions of the wrath to come and that real spiritual touch of God, the Holy Spirit, which breaks and melts the heart and then casts it into another mold. These people were deceived as to the depth and sincerity of their own feelings. Doubtless they reckoned themselves choice penitents when they were only cowardly tremblers, laboring under impressions which were as useless as they were transient. Their feeling was but as a meteor's blaze, shedding strong but momentary light —

“What sadder scenes can angels view
Than self-deceiving tears?
They give you hope, a hope untrue,
Then deepen all your fears.”

We are quite sure that these people, though they wept, were none the better for it, because if they had been, they would have cried, “Come, brethren, get your swords. Let us go and fight these Hivites and Hittites, and cast down their altars, and sweep away their images and groves.” No, they kept their idle swords in their scabbards, and made treaties with the condemned races. They used not their axes to cut down the false gods, but they said, “Let us have respect to the religion of others. There is no doubt that their idolatry is wrong, in fact, their practices are questionable, and we are very sorry for it, but we need not interfere, nor execute Jehovah's sentence with a bare literalness.” In addition, they very likely confessed and deplored their own

laxity, and went the length of saying, “It is very grievous that we should be so obstinate. It is really a dreadful thing.” I heard one say, “It is an awful thing to be a slave to the wine cup. I wish that I had never tasted it. The first opportunity I get, I will turn over a new leaf.” He did not say what the new leaf would be, but he was going to do any quantity of reforming work. Alas, he never did anything at all, for he was drunk again the next day. A beautiful penitent to look upon, but a wretched hypocrite in due time, for he returned like the dog to his vomit, and the sow which was washed to her wallowing in the mire. If you repent of sin, down with sin! In God’s name, down with sin! When repentance is hearty it is practical. When a man truly turns to God, he turns away from sin. If Satan is effectually driven out of a man, the emancipated one sweeps his house out, and purges himself of the filth which he formerly harbored, he plucks out right-eye lusts and cuts off right-arm sins, for he feels that he can no longer transgress against his God.

Next, these people had not repented, for they did not bring their children up rightly. The next generation, it is said, knew not the Lord, neither the mighty works of the Lord. That was because their parents did not teach them. Not that parents can teach their children so that they know the Lord in their hearts, but God has so put it—“Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” That is the great general rule of God’s moral government. If parents make known the things of God to their children, it cannot be said that the children do not know the works of God. If parents teach with affectionate earnestness, their children learn at least the letter of the truth. I do not believe in your repentance for sin if you tolerate your child’s living in it. I cannot believe that you know the Lord unless you long for your offspring to know Him. A man says, “Oh, it is an evil thing, but you know, young people will have their own way, and we must not be too strict.”

Sorrowfully we do foresee what will become of young people who have parents that do not love them enough to restrain them from doing evil. Well you may weep, for you are murdering the souls of your own flesh and blood. Woe unto you, with all your tears, if you have no regard for your household, and no care to bring up your children in the fear of God.

I know that these people did not repent aright, because they went from bad to worse. They went from weeping before God to worshipping Baal, like some I have heard of who are found crying in the house of God on Sunday night, and are laughing at the theater on Monday night. O base hypocrites! Penitents at a dance! Broken-hearted sinners on Sunday, crying, “Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners,” and whole-hearted drunkards before the week is up, yelling, “We won’t go home till morning.” Look at the miserable sinners, see what they are at. Are these your weepers, these your men of tender conscience? Their Bochim is all a lie—a mere pretense. The tenderer you are, if afterwards you harden yourselves, so much the greater will be your guilt, and if you humble yourselves before God in mere appearance, so much the more terrible will be your doom if that humbleness departs, and you go back to the sin from which you professed to turn.

I know that these people were not penitents, because God did not take away the chastisement. The punishment which He threatened, He brought upon them. He gave them over to the spoilers and sold them to their enemies. But where there is a hearty repentance of sin, God will never lay punishment on a man. He will forgive him and receive him to His bosom and restore him.

To sum up in a word all that I have said, salvation lies not in feeling, but in believing. Salvation lies not in weeping, but in trusting in Christ. Repentance is not to be measured by outward

manifestations of sorrow. The prophet says, “Rend your heart, and not your garments.” Let your hearts be torn away from sin, and from everything that leads to sin, and then shall you weep acceptably before God.

The Lord bless this word to those it is meant for. I do not know who they are, but He does, and may He send His blessing by His Holy Spirit. Amen.

1681 MESSIAH'S GLORIOUS WORK – DAN. 9:24

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, September 24, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“Seventy weeks are determined upon your people and upon your holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.” — Daniel 9:24

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Daniel 9]

THE LORD GOD APPOINTED a set time for the coming of His Son into the world. Nothing was left to chance. Infinite wisdom dictated the hour at which the Messiah should be born, and the moment at which He should be cut off. His advent and His work are the highest point of the purpose of God, the hinge of history, the center of providence, the crowning of the edifice of grace, and therefore peculiar care watched over every detail. Once in the history of the world has the Son of God appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and this is *the* event before which all other events must bow. The studious mind will be delighted to search out the reasons why the Messiah came not before, and why He did not tarry till yet later ages. Prophecies declared the date, but long before, infallible wisdom had settled it for the most profound reasons. It was well that

the Redeemer came; it was well that He came in what Scripture calls the fullness of time, even in these last days.

Note, again, that the Lord told His people somewhat darkly, but still, with a fair measure of clearness, when the Christ would come. Thus He cheered them when the heavy clouds of woe hung over their path. This prophecy shone like a star in the midst of the sorrow of Israel. So bright was it, that at the period when Christ came, there was a general expectation of Him. Holy men and women, diligent in the study of the Scriptures, were waiting for Him. Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and Anna looked for redemption in Jerusalem with others of like mind. Not only the Jews, but the Samaritans expected Him, for the woman at the well exclaimed, “I know that the Messiah comes, which is called Christ.” Even in heathen lands there was remarkable cessation from stir and battle; an unusual peace reigned over all the nations and the hush of expectation ruled the hour —

No war, or battle's sound,
Was heard the world around—
The idle spear and shield were high up hung;
The hooked chariot stood
Unstained with hostile blood;
The trumpet spoke not to the armed throng;
And kings sat still with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their Sovereign Lord was by.

Men were looking out for the coming One; for the corn of earth was ripe for the reaper. Men were on the tiptoe of expectation, and wondered when the promised Prince would arrive. Alas, they knew Him not when He appeared. After this fashion are things at the present moment with regard to the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. “Of that day and of

that hour knows no man,” but it is known unto God, and fixed in the roll of His eternal purposes. “Known unto God, are all His works from the creation of the world,” and especially those grand works which concern the person of our adorable Lord Jesus. He shall come as God has appointed. The vision of His glory shall not tarry. He has given us suggestive hints as to that glorious appearing, and He has plainly taught us to be looking for and hastening unto the day of the Lord. Among His last words are these, “Surely I come quickly,” these are words of consolation as well of warning. He bids us watch constantly for the coming of the Lord, that it overtake us not as a thief in the night. And He assures us that He will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God. Therefore comfort one another with the glad tidings, and whenever your hearts sicken because of abounding sin, hear with the ear of faith the voice of promise crying, “Behold, the Bridegroom comes.” Rest assured that He comes, who will in the fullest and most manifest sense finish transgression, and make an end of sin, and bring in everlasting righteousness. The advent of the Well-beloved is the consolation of His mourning saints. Both at His first and second appearing the Lord not only comes to drive away the wicked as chaff, but also to comfort and exalt His elect. It is a day that shall burn as an oven, and yet to the redeemed it will be the happiest day that ever dawned.

The first advent of our Lord is spoken of in our text as ordained to be before the seventy weeks were finished, and the city should be destroyed. And so it was, even as the prophet had spoken. I shall not occupy your time by attempting to fix the beginning and the end of the period intended by the seventy weeks, and the seven weeks and three-score and two weeks. That is a deep study, requiring much research and learning, and I conceive that the discussion of such a subject would be of no great practical use to us this Sabbath morning. You will be

better nourished upon the Lord Himself than upon times and seasons. Suffice it to believe that Jesus Christ our Lord, the Messiah, came exactly as it was prophesied, and remained on earth as it was foretold He should do. In the middle of the predestined week He was cut off, when He had completed three and a half years of saving ministry, and within another period of like length the gospel was preached throughout all nations, and Messiah's peculiar relation to Israel was cut off. At another time it may afford you profitable contemplation if you consider the four hundred and ninety years from the decree of the king for rebuilding to the overthrow of Jerusalem.

We will at this present hour survey the work of the *Messiah*—that is His Hebrew name, or of *Christ*, which is the Greek interpretation thereof. *Let us survey the work of the Anointed.* Secondly, *let us inquire as to our participation in it.* And then, thirdly, *let us contemplate the consequences which follow upon us being sharers in it, or upon our not being participants in it.* Oh for a measure of the anointing, that we may fitly meditate upon our great theme. Come, Holy Spirit and rest upon us.

I. First, LET US SURVEY THE MESSIAH'S WORK.

According to my text it divides itself into two grand works, which two works subdivide themselves in each case into three particulars.

The first work of our Lord Jesus Christ is the overthrow of evil, and it is thus described—"To finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity." But our Lord's labor is not all spent upon pulling-down work. He comes to build up, and His second work is the setting up of righteousness in the world, described again by three sentences, "To bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy."

The first work of the Messiah is the overthrow of evil. This overthrow of evil is described by three words. If I were to give

you a literal translation from the Hebrew, I might read the passage thus, “To shut up the transgression, to seal up sin and to cover up iniquity.” According to learned men, those are the words which are here used, and the three put together are a singularly complete description of the putting away of sin. First, it is *shut up*. It is, as it were, taken prisoner and confined in a cell. The door is fastened and it is held in durance. It is out of sight, held to a narrow range, unable to exercise the power it once possessed. In a word, it is “restrained”—so the margin of our Bibles reads it. The Hebrew word signifies to hold back, to hold in, to arrest, and to keep in prison, to shut in or shut up. Its dominion is finished, for sin itself is bound. Christ has led captivity captive.

But it is not enough to shut up the vanquished tyrant, unless he is shut up forever, and therefore, lest there should be any possibility of his breaking loose again, the next sentence is, “*To seal up*.” The uses of the seal are many, but here it is employed for certainty of custody. Just as when Daniel was thrown into the lions’ den, the king sealed the stone with his own signet and with the signet of his lords. Or, better still, as when our divine Master was laid in the grave, they rolled the stone to the mouth of the sepulcher, and His enemies set a seal and a watch, lest His body should be stolen by His disciples. In His case —

“Vain the stone, the watch, the seal,
Christ has burst the gates of hell.”

But sin cannot thus arise. It is imprisoned in the sepulcher of Jesus, and it can never come forth, for the royal seal of the immutable God is set upon the door. Thus is sin placed doubly out of sight, it is shut up and sealed up, as a document put into a case and then sealed down. “Finished” and “made an end of”

are the two words used in our authorized version, and they give the essence of the meaning. To borrow a figure from current events—Arabi, the Egyptian rebel, is shut up as our prisoner, and his defeat is sealed, therefore his rebellion is finished and an end made of it. Even thus is it with transgression. Our Lord has vanquished evil, and certified the same under the hand and seal of the omnipotent, and therefore we may with rapture hear Him say, “It is finished,” and also behold Him rise from the dead to seal our justification.

Yet, as if this might not suffice, the next term in the Hebrew is *to cover up*, for the word to make reconciliation or expiation is usually in the Hebrew, to cover over. “Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” Christ has come to cover sin, to atone for it, and so to hide it. His glorious merits and substitutionary sufferings and death put away sin so completely that God Himself beholds it no more. He has blotted it out, cast it into the sea, and removed it from us as far as the east is from the west. The two former sentences speak of finishing transgression and making an end of sin, and these expressions are full and complete, while this third one explains the means by which the work is done, namely, by an expiation which covers up every trace of sin. Thus in the three together we have a picture of the utter extinction of sin, both as to its guilt and its power, yes, and its very existence. It is put into the dungeon and the door is shut upon it. After this the door is sealed and then it is covered up, so that the place of sin’s sepulcher cannot be seen anymore forever. Sin was aforetime in God’s sight, but through Christ Jesus we read, “You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people; You have covered all their sin; You have taken away all Your wrath.” Sin was in God’s way till Christ shut it up, and now it pushes itself no more into the sight of the Lord. Sin was always breaking

loose till Jesus sealed it up, but now it cannot come forth to lay any accusation against the justified.

The three words might be put into one word by saying; Christ has made a clean sweep of sin of every kind. Whatever may be its special development, whether it is transgression, which means the breaking of bounds, or sin, which is any lack of conformity to the law, or iniquity—that is to say, inequity, or the lack of equity, a default in righteousness, in all forms in which it can be described Christ has shut it up, sealed it up and covered it up by His atoning sacrifice once and for all. The depths have covered it. If it is searched for, it cannot be found. Our blessed Scapegoat has carried it away into the land of forgetfulness; it shall not be mentioned against us anymore forever. Those three words contain infinitely more of meaning than I have either space or ability to set forth.

Observe dear friends that the terms for sin are left in an absolute form. It is said “to finish transgression,” “to make an end of sins,” “to make reconciliation for iniquity.” Whose transgression is this? Whose sins are these? Whose iniquity is it? It is not said. There is no word employed to set out the persons for whom atonement is made, as is done in verses like these—“Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it.” “I lay down My life for the sheep.” The mass of evil is left unlabeled, so that any penitent sinner may look to the Messiah and find in Him the remover of sin. What transgression is finished; transgression of every kind. But what sins are made an end of; sins of every sort—against law and against gospel, against God and against men, sins past, sins present, sins to come. And what iniquity is expiated? Every form of iniquity, whatever falls short by omission, whatever goes beyond by commission. Christ, in this passage, is spoken of in general terms as removing sins, transgressions, and iniquities in the mass. In other places we read of the objects of His substitution, but here all is left

indefinite to encourage all. He gives us no catalog of offenses, for where should He write it? The very heavens could not hold the enumeration, but He just takes the whole, unformed, horrible, black, disgusting mass, and this is what He does with it—He encloses it, fastens it up, and buries it forever. In the words of our version, He finishes it, makes an end of it, and makes expiation for it. The Messiah came to wipe out and utterly destroy sin, and this is, and will be, the effect of His work. Put all the three sentences into one and this is the sum of them.

Indulge me for a few minutes while I take the sentences separately and press each cluster by itself. And first notice that it is said He came *to finish the transgression*. As some understand it, our Lord came that in His death, transgression, might reach its highest development and sign its own condemnation. Sin reached its finish, its ultimatum, its climax, in the murder of the Son of God. It could not proceed further; the course of malice could go no further. They had stoned the prophets and killed everyone that was sent to them. But now He came, and God said, “They will reverence My Son,” but they did not. On the other hand, they cried, “This is the heir. Let us kill Him and the inheritance shall be ours.” Sin finished itself when it brought forth the death of the Son of God. It could produce no riper fruit, for no supposable crime can exceed the putting to death of Jesus our Lord. Now has sin finished itself, and now has Jesus come to finish it. “Thus far,” He says, “you shall go, but no further: here in My wounds and death shall your proud waves be stopped.” Sin virtually committed suicide when it slew the Savior, for His death became its death. The kingdom of sin was overthrown in that day when it smote the Prince of Peace. Then was a period put to the dominion of evil, and to come back to the Hebrew, the Lord restrained transgression and Satan was bound with a great chain. “The times of this

ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men everywhere to repent,” sin may no longer range unchecked. Sin is now arrested and held under warrant, restrained under the bonds of law, and from the day of our Lord by the preaching of the gospel, sin has become more and more shut up as to its reigning power.

Some men have been altogether delivered from the rule of evil and other men, who remain its slaves, yet go not to such a pitch of outward riot as they would have done had not Christ appeared. Sin is being besieged. It skulks behind its earthworks. Its sorties are becoming fewer and less forcible, and though it is still powerful, the hour of its pride is passed, its head has received a deadly wound. The age has come in which the victory of truth and righteousness is guaranteed by the death of Jesus Christ our Lord. Your *finis* is written, O transgression! Written by the pierced hand! Your huge volume has in it writing long enough and grievous enough, full enough of blasphemy against God and of evil towards men, but now the Lord Jesus takes the pen from you, and you shall write no more as you have done. The huge leviathan of evil has met its match, and is placed under the power of the Avenger. Thus says the Lord, “Behold, I will put My hook in your nose and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you by the way by which you came.” The Lord has set bounds to the transgression which aforetime broke all bounds. Where sin abounded, grace does much more abound. Sin is shut up that grace may have liberty. This is one part of our Lord’s great work, all glory be unto His name, He has accomplished it with power, and the power of the enemy is broken.

Now take the second sentence, which, in our version is, “*To make an end of sin.*” Messiah has come to proclaim so free, so rich, so gracious a pardon to the sons of men that when they receive it, sin virtually ceases to be, it is made an end of. The

man that is in Christ, and has Christ for His covenant head, is this day so delivered from all sin whatsoever, that he may boldly ask the question, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?” If Christ has made an end of sin that is the end of it. The matter is ended and no more is to be said. Down among the dead men let sin lie, forever buried by the right hand of the conquering Savior.

But the Hebrew has it “to seal up sins.” Now, I take it to mean just this. There are certain handwritings which are against us, and they would be produced against us in court, but by order of the Judge all these handwritings are sealed up, and regarded as out of sight. No man dare break the seal, and no man can read them unless the seal is broken, therefore they will never be brought against us. They have become virtually null and void. Everything that can be brought as an accusation against God’s people is now sealed up and put out of the way once and for all, never to be opened and laid to their charge before the living God. Or, if you regard sin as a captive prisoner, you must now see that by Christ’s death, the prison wherein sin lies is so sealed that the enemy can never come forth again in its ancient power. Sin could once sit on the highest mountain and look over the world and say, “All this is mine.” And the embodiment of sin could come to Christ and say of all the kingdoms of the world, “All these will I give You,” as though he claimed them all for his own.

But it is not so today. The mountain of the Lord’s house is this day exalted upon the top of the hills, and though as yet all nations do not flow unto it, yet a glorious company comes streaming up to the temple of the living God, and that company shall increase from day to day. As when a brooklet grows to a stream, and the streamlet rises to a river, and the river swells till it rolls in fullest force into the shoreless main, so is it yet to be with the ever-growing church of Jesus Christ, which before

long shall carry all before it and cover the earth with blessing. Evil, you cannot reign! Jesus has come and overcome you Himself, and taught man to vanquish you! You cannot come again to the crown you once had, for the seed of the woman has broken your head. He shall reign forever and ever, and you shall die! Hallelujah! The coffin of sin is both shut up and fastened down with the seal of Christ's victory.

But now, the last expression is in English, He has come "*to make reconciliation for iniquity.*" That is to end the strife between God and man by a glorious reconciliation, a making again of peace between these two, so that God loves man, and as a consequence, man loves God. In the blessed atonement of Christ, God and man meet at a chosen meeting place. Christ is Jehovah's darling and our delight. A slain Savior is well-pleasing to God, and oh, how pleasing He is to a sinner who is deeply under a sense of sin! Here, here is that mercy seat sprinkled with blood where man may speak to God without fear, and where God does speak to man without wrath. Here righteousness and peace have met together. Mercy and truth have kissed each other. Oh, glorious reconciliation which Christ has made by honoring the law in His life and in His death.

Now, take the Hebrew for it, and read the sentence thus—to cover iniquity. Oh, what bliss this is. To think, dear friends, that sin is now once for all covered! Not as though it lay rankling there beneath some coverlet through which fire might burn, or lightning strike, but Christ's covering is such that, if you could heap hell over sin, it were not so hidden, and if you could pile worlds upon it, were not so concealed, and if all heaven bowed to overlay it, it were not so out of sight as when Jesus buried it deeper than the lowest depths, where no memory can remember it, or mind perceive it—

“Our guilt shall vanish quite away,

Though black as hell before,
Shall be dissolved beneath the sea,
And shall be found no more.”

This is what is to be done with the whole kingdom of evil, as well with the power of it and with the guilt of it. Dagon is to fall and to be broken, and the very stump of him is to be demolished. As when the darkness flies before the sun, not a trace of its blackness is left, so is sin to be utterly destroyed from the redeemed of the Lord. It is not merely the guilt of sin that is shut up and sealed and covered, but sin itself, its power, its dominion, its habit, its defilement, the dread that comes of it, and the fear and the burning of heart which it engenders. All the foul birds of sin's filthy cage must fly away, never to return, chased away by the glorious work of Him who shall save His people from their sins. For this the Messiah was cut off, and this, by His death is achieved —

“O love! You bottomless abyss!
My sins are swallowed up in thee;
Covered is my unrighteousness,
Nor spot of guilt remains on me.
While Jesus' blood, through earth and skies,
Mercy, free, boundless mercy cries!”

I fail to describe this triumphant overthrow of sin and Satan. I have neither wisdom nor language answerable to such a theme. I invite you now for a few minutes to consider the second work, namely, *the setting up of righteousness*. This is set before us in three expressions, first in the words “to bring in everlasting righteousness.” And what is that? Why, His own righteousness, which is from everlasting to everlasting and will never be taken away from those who have it, and will never cease

to be their beauty and their glorious Jesus. The work of Christ in His life and death is by God imputed to His people. Indeed it is theirs because they are one with Christ. He is the Lord their righteousness, and they are the righteousness of God in Him. Saints are so righteous in Jesus Christ that they are more righteous than Adam was before he fell, for he had but creature righteousness, and they have the righteousness of the Creator. Adam had a righteousness which he lost, but believers have a righteousness which they can never lose, an everlasting righteousness. Nor is that all the meaning of our text. Those to whom God imputes righteousness, to them also He imparts righteousness. He makes them pure in heart, He changes their desires, He makes them love that which is right and just and good, and so He gives them grace to lead godly, sober, honest, and holy lives. This righteousness shall not be crushed out of them, for the work of the Spirit shall continue until they shall become perfect, and be conformed to dwell with God in light. Happy are those spirits to whom Christ gives an everlasting righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom and in it they shall shine forth as the sun. They are right and they shall be right, they are true and they shall never degenerate into falsehood, they are God's own children and they shall go on to develop the image of Christ, their elder brother, till they shall be without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. This Christ came to do. He imputes and imparts righteousness, and thus brings in everlasting righteousness as the foundation of His kingdom.

Next, in order to the setting up of a kingdom of righteousness, He is come that He may "seal up vision and prophecy." That is, by fulfilling all the visions and the prophecies of the Old Testament in Himself, He ends both prophecy and vision. He seals up visions and prophecies so that they shall no more be seen or spoken. They are closed and no man can add to them, and therefore—and that is the point to

note—the gospel is forever settled, to remain eternally the same. Christ has set up a kingdom that shall never be moved. His truth can never be changed by any novel revelation. If any man comes to you and says, “I am a prophet!” bid him go and find believers among the foolish, for to you Jesus has sealed up prophecy. If any man come and say, “I have somewhat to reveal which contradicts the old gospel,” tell him to go and preach to those who choose to hear him, but you know better, for Christ to you has sealed up prophecy and vision, and there is to be no more of it. There is no need of it, because in Christ, God has spoken all He means to say concerning the way of salvation. Until such time as Christ Himself shall come, the canon is complete, and though there are many voices crying, “Lo, here!” and “Lo, there!” and some so fascinating that they might deceive, if it were possible, the very elect, yet those whom Christ has chosen know the Shepherd’s voice, and “a stranger they will not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers.” Brethren, there was always something better yet to come in all times till Christ arrived, but after the best, there comes none.

A certain philosopher taught *this*; the next philosopher taught *that*, and the next one contradicted this and that, and taught another thing, while another master arose and contradicted all who went before. So man groped as in the dark for the wall, but now the day has dawned, and the true light shines, for Christ has appeared. This, then, is an essential part of the setting up of that which is good—namely, to settle truth on a fixed basis, whereon we may stand steadfast, immovable. The candles are snuffed out because the day itself, looks out from the windows of heaven. Rejoice in this, beloved. God makes you righteous in Christ and with Christ, and in order that you shall never be perplexed with change, He sets aside all other teachers, that Christ may be your all in all.

Then, as if this were not enough, and truly it would not be enough, He is also come *to anoint the Most Holy*, or the Holy of holies, as you may read it. And what does this mean? Nothing material, for the Holy of holies, the place into which the High Priest went of old is demolished and the veil is torn. The most holy place is now the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was anointed that God might dwell in Him. Together with Christ, the Holy of holies is now His church, and that church was anointed or dedicated when the Holy Spirit fell at Pentecost, to be with us, and to abide in us forever. That was a noble part of the setting up of the great kingdom of righteousness, when tongues of fire descended and sat upon each of the disciples, and they began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. This is Christ's work, for which He came, and for which He ascended on high, to set up the truth, to set up righteousness, and to make it everlasting by the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Church of God in the midst of the sons of men.

Thus you see, in six ways, which condense themselves into two, our Lord set about His lordly enterprise. Heaven rings with the praises of the Messiah who came to destroy the work of sin, and to set up the kingdom of righteousness in the midst of the world.

II. LET US NOW INQUIRE AS TO OUR PARTICIPATION IN THESE TWO WORKS. I will put a few questions as briefly as I can, and I pray God, the Holy Spirit, that every one of us may honestly answer them.

First, dear brethren, Christ has come into the world to do all this good work, but has He done it for us? "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." What for? "That whoever believes in Him might not perish." There is a general aspect to the atonement, but there is quite as surely a special objective in it. God loved the world, and therefore He

gave His Son. But to what end did He give His Son? Here is the answer, “That whoever believes in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life.”

There was a special eye to believers. Come, then, have you believed? The first question that is to help you to answer that inquiry is this—is your sin shut up as to its power? “Sin shall not have dominion over you” if Christ is in you. How is it between your soul and evil? Is there war or peace? Once you loved sin, you could not have enough of it. Is it so now? Do you still delight in evil? For if you do the love of God is not in you. Can you still put forth your hand to iniquity as you once did? Then do not pretend that Christ has done anything for you. If you are a believer, your sin may not be absolutely dead, but it is shut up for dead. It is held fast in the condemned cell. It may still breathe, but it is crucified with Christ. How it tugs to get its hands loose from the nails! How it struggles to get its feet down from the tree! But it cannot, for He that nailed it there knew how to drive nails, and how to fasten the offender to the tree. Do you begin to grow weary of iniquity? Is it distasteful and unpleasant to you? And when looking over the day, you perceive where you have spoken unadvisedly or acted hastily, or in any other way soiled your character; do you feel as if you would gladly wash out every spot with tears? If it is so, Christ has begun with you. He has come to shut up your sin, and to end its reign. It shall no more have dominion over you. It may be in you, but it shall not be on the throne. It may threaten you, but it shall not command you. It may grieve you, but it shall not destroy you. You are under another Master, you serve the Lord Christ. Judge for yourself how this matter fares with you.

The next question arising out of the text is; is your sin sealed up as to its condemning power? Have you ever felt the power of the Holy Spirit in your soul, saying to you, “Go in

peace; your sins, which are many, are all forgiven you”? Have you clutched that promise, “He that believes in Him is not condemned”? Have you believed in Jesus? And has that blessed word “There is therefore now no condemnation,” breathed a deep calm over your spirit? Some of you do not know what I mean, but others of you do. Oh, what bliss, what a heaven it is to know, “I am washed in the blood of the Lamb—I am delivered, clean delivered from every sin, past, present, and to come, as to any possibility of its being laid to my charge. Christ has put my sins into a bag, sealed them up, hurled that bag into the sea, and flung them out of existence, and they are gone, never to be found again anymore.” He has made an end of sin. Come, dear hearer, do you know anything about this? If you do not, it is the one thing you need to know, and until you know it you will never have any rest to your spirit, but you will be tossed to and fro as upon a raging sea. “There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked.” There is no peace to any of us till Christ has made an end of our sin. How is it with your hearts?

And next, is your sin covered as to its appearance before God? Has the Lord Jesus Christ made such expiation for your sin that it no longer glares in the presence of the Most High, but you can come unto God without dread? Can you hopefully say, “Lord God, You see no sin in me, for You have covered me with the righteousness of Christ, and washed me in His blood”? Did you ever feel the sweetness of that? It is rapture! I can remember times when I have been driven to doubt whether it could be true, it seemed too good, and then again, when my faith has revived, I have said, “Good as it is, it is true, for it is like God to do these great marvels, and to put away the sins of His people and cover them once and for all.” Oh, then there has been a joy within my spirit not at all like the joy of harvest, or the joy of marriage, or the joy of a first-born child in the house. No, it is a joy like the bliss of angels, deep, unspeakable,

mysterious, divine. Have you ever felt it? You will feel it constantly if Christ comes to dwell with you. You will then be assured in your heart that He has made an end of your sin.

Further, let me question you about the next point. Has the Lord Jesus Christ made you righteous? Do you glory in His blood and righteousness, and do you now seek after that which is pure and holy? “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatever a man sow, that shall he also reap.” If we continue in sin we shall perish in sin. He is saved who comes out from evil and seeks to live honestly, righteously, soberly, after the manner of the godly and the saintly. Is it so with you? Is there a great and deep change in your spirit, so that you now love those good things which once you despised and ridiculed in others? Oh, if you cannot answer my poor questions, how will you stand before the judgment seat of God when He shall test you as with fire?

Furthermore, are the prophecies and visions sealed up as to you? Are they fulfilled in you? When God declares that He will wash us and make us whiter than snow, is it so with you? When He declares that He will cleanse our blood, which has not yet been cleansed, is it so with you? When He says, “A new heart also will I give them, and a right spirit will I put within them: and I will write My law upon their hearts” is it so with you? Are you fishing about after empty dreams and fancies, or have you laid hold upon the old prophecies and the ancient visions, and discovered the substance of them to be deeply worked in your very heart?

Nor is this all, are you anointed to be most holy to the Lord? Are you set apart that you may serve Him? Has the Holy Spirit come upon you, giving you a desire to do good? Have you a wish to rescue the perishing, a longing to bring the wandering sheep back to the great Shepherd's fold? Is the Spirit of God so upon you today that you can truly say, “I am not my own; I

am bought with a price”? Jesus, the Messiah, came to do all these things, and if He has not done them to you, then He has not come to you, you are still a stranger, still far off from Him. Oh, may the Lord make you desperately unhappy till you come to Jesus. May you never know what quiet means till you find it at the pierced feet! From this hour may you breathe sighs, and may every pulse be a new agony of spirit, till at last you can say, “Yes, the Messiah was cut off, and cut off for me, and all that He came to do He did for me, and I am a sharer and a partaker in it all.”

III. Lastly, we have but a brief interval in which to speak of **THE RESULTS OF PARTICIPATING IN ALL THIS.** The results! I need a week to speak of them. They are, first of all, *security*. How can that man be lost, whose transgression is finished, and whose sin has ceased to be? What is there for him to dread on earth, in heaven, or in hell? If Christ has put away my sin, I cannot die, if Christ has washed away my guilt, I cannot be condemned, I am safe, and may triumphantly sing—

“More happy, but not more secure,
The glorified spirits in heaven.”

Therefore, rejoice in this.

And now, inasmuch as you are secure, you are also *reconciled* to God, and made to delight in Him. God is your friend, and you are one of the friends of God. Rejoice in that hallowed friendship, and live in the assurance of it. Now you have the anointing, do not doubt it. Christ has made it yours by His death. The Spirit of the Lord rests upon you; you are fit for service, set about it without further question. The anointing is upon you, you are most holy to the Lord, so let your life be wholly consecrated. Your heart ought to be, and shall be by the Spirit's power, as holy as that innermost shrine into which no

unauthorized foot ever intruded, into which only once in the year the high priest went, and then not without blood. God dwells in you and you in God. Oh, blessed consequences—you shall soon dwell with Him forever!

But now suppose when I put the question, you had to shake your head and say, “No, it is not so with me”? Then hear these few sentences. If the Messiah has not done this for you, then your sin will be finished in another way—sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. An awful death awaits you—death unto God, and purity and joy. Woe, woe, to you. Death on the pale horse pursues you, and will overtake you soon. Then will one woe be past, but another will follow it. If Christ has never made an end of your sin, then mark this, your sin will soon make an end of you, and all your hopes, your pleasure, your boastings, and your peace will perish. Oh, terrible end of all that is hopeful within you. You shall be a desolation forever and forever. Has not Christ reconciled you? Then mark this, your enmity will increase. There is no peace between God and you now, but soon will the war begin in which He must conquer, and you, never yielding, will continue forever more to hate God, and to find in that hate your utmost torment, your fiercest hell. Have you never had the righteousness of Christ brought in? Then mark this, your unrighteousness will last forever. One of these days God will say, “He that is unholy, let him be unholy still: He that is filthy, let him be filthy still.” That will be the most awful thing that can ever happen to you. You have heard of the fable of Medusa’s head. Whoever looked upon it when it was held up was turned to stone, and one day, sinner, you shall look at death, and it will petrify your character so that it shall be forever what it is when death came to you. Where death finds you, there judgment shall find you, and there eternity shall leave you. Oh, wretched soul, to have nothing to do with the everlasting righteousness of Christ!

Are not the prophecies fulfilled in you, the prophecies of mercy? Then listen. The prophecies of woe will be written large across your history. “The wicked shall be turned into hell, with all the nations that forget God.” Beware, you that forget God, lest He tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver. I will not detain you with many such words of terror, but through the Old Testament they roll like peals of thunder, nor is the New Testament less stern towards him that goes on in his iniquity and will not turn to the Christ.

Lastly, will you never be anointed to be most holy? Then remember, holiness and you will stand at a distance, forever, and to be far off from holiness must necessarily be to be far off from heaven and happiness. Sin is misery. In it lies both the root and the fruit of eternal woe. Purity is paradise, to be right with God is to be right with yourself and all created things, but if you will not be holy, then you must by force of your own choice be forever tossed about upon the restless sea of wretchedness. God save you, brothers and sisters, God save you for Christ's sake. Amen.

1682 ASK AND HAVE – JAMES 4:2-3

A Sermon

Delivered on Sunday Morning, October 1, 1882,

by the

REV. C. H. SPURGEON

At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. — James 4:2-3

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Luke 10:38-42; 11:1-13]

MAY THESE STRIKING WORDS be made profitable to us by the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

Man is a creature abounding in wants, and ever restless, and hence his heart is full of desires. I can hardly imagine a man existing who has not many desires of some kind or another. Man is comparable to the sea anemone with its multitude of tentacles which are always hunting in the water for food, or like certain plants which send out tendrils, seeking after the means of climbing. The poet says, “Man never is, but always to be, blest.” He steers for which he thinks to be his port, but as yet he is tossed about on the waves. One of these days he hopes to find his heart’s delight, and he continues to desire with more or less expectancy.

This fact appertains both to the worst of men and the best of men. In bad men desires corrupt into lusts, they long after that which is selfish, sensual, and consequently evil. The

current of their desires sets strongly in a wrong direction. These lustings, in many cases, become extremely intense, they make the man their slave, they domineer over his judgment, they stir him up to violence, he fights and wars, perhaps he literally kills, in God's sight, who counts anger murder, he does kill full often. Such is the strength of his desires that they are commonly called passions, and when these passions are fully excited, then the man himself struggles vehemently, so that the kingdom of the devil suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

Meanwhile in gracious men there are desires also. To rob the saints of their desires would be to injure them greatly, for by these they rise out of their lower selves. The desires of the gracious are after the best things, things pure and peaceable, laudable and elevating. They desire God's glory, and hence their desires spring from higher motives than those which inflame the unrenewed mind. Such desires in Christian men are frequently very fervent and forcible, they ought always to be so, and those desires begotten of the Spirit of God stir the renewed nature, exciting and stimulating it, and making the man to groan and to be in anguish and in travail until he can attain that which God has taught him to long for. The lusting of the wicked and the holy desiring of the righteous have their own ways of seeking gratification.

The lusting of the wicked develops itself in contention, it kills, and desires to have, it fights and it wars, while on the other hand the desire of the righteous when rightly guided betakes itself to a far better course for achieving its purpose, for it expresses itself in prayer fervent and importunate. The godly man when full of desire asks and receives at the hands of God.

At this time I shall by God's help try to set forth from our text, first, *the poverty of lusting* — “Ye lust and have not.” Secondly, I shall sadly show *the poverty of many professing Christians* in spiritual things, especially in their church capacity, they also

long for and have not. Thirdly, we shall speak in closing, upon *the wealth wherewith holy desires will be rewarded if we will but use the right means*. If we ask we shall receive.

I. First, consider **THE POVERTY OF LUSTING** — “*Ye lust, and have not.*”

Carnal lustings, however strong they may be, do not in many cases obtain that which they seek after, as says the text, “Ye desire to have, and cannot obtain.” The man longs to be happy, but he is not, he pines to be great, but he grows lower every day, he aspires after this and after that which he thinks will content him, but he is still unsatisfied, he is like the troubled sea which cannot rest. One way or another his life is disappointment, he labors as in the very fire, but the result is vanity and vexation of spirit. How can it be otherwise? If we sow the wind, must we not reap the whirlwind, and nothing else?

Or if peradventure the strong lustings of an active, talented, persevering man do give him what he seeks after, yet how soon he loses it. He has it so that he has it not. The pursuit is toilsome, but the possession is a dream. He sits down to eat, and lo! the feast is snatched away, the cup vanishes when it is at his lip. He wins to lose, he builds, and his sandy foundation slips from under his tower, and it lies in ruins. He that conquered kingdoms, died discontented on a lone rock in mid ocean, and he who revived his empire, fell never to rise again.

As Jonah’s gourd withered in a night, so have empires fallen on a sudden, and their lords have died in exile. So that what men obtain by warring and fighting is an estate with a short lease, the obtaining is so temporary that it still stands true, “they lust, and have not.” Or if such men have gifts and power enough to retain that which they have won, yet in another sense they have it not while they have it, for the pleasure which they looked for in it is not there. They pluck the apple, and it turns

out to be one of those Dead Sea apples which crumble to ashes in the hand. The man is rich, but God takes away from him the power to enjoy his wealth.

By his lustings and his warrings the licentious man at last obtains the objective of his cravings, and after a moment's gratification, he loathes that which he so passionately lusted for. He longs for the tempting pleasure, seizes it, and crushes it by the eager grasp. See the boy hunting the butterfly, which flits from flower to flower, while he pursues it ardently. At last it is within reach, and with his cap he knocks it down, but when he picks up the poor remains, he finds the painted fly spoiled by the act which won it. Thus may it be said of multitudes of the sons of men — “Ye lust, and have not.”

Their poverty is set forth in a threefold manner. “Ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain,” “Ye have not, because ye ask not.” “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss.”

If the lusters fail, it is not because they did not set to work to gain their ends, for according to their nature they used the most practical means within their reach, and used them eagerly too. According to the mind of the flesh the only way to obtain a thing is to fight for it, and James sets this down as the reason of all fighting. “Whence come wars and fighting among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?” This is the form of effort of which we read, “*Ye fight and war, yet ye have not.*”

To this mode of operation men cling from age to age. If a man is to get along in this world they tell me he must contend with his neighbors, and push them from their vantage ground, he must not be particular how *they* are to thrive, but he must mind the main chance on his own account, and take care to rise, no matter how many he may tread upon. He cannot expect to get on if he loves his neighbor as himself. It is a fair fight, and every man must look to himself.

Do you think I am satirical? I may be, but I have heard this sort of talk from men who meant it. So they take to fighting, and that fighting is often victorious, for according to the text, “*ye kill*”—that is to say, they so fight that they overthrow their adversary, and there is an end of him. They are men of great strength, young lions that can go forth and tear their prey, and yet it is said of them that they “lack and suffer hunger,” while they that wait upon the Lord shall not want any good thing. These lusts are unrestrained in their efforts to gain their point, they stick at nothing, they kill, and desire to have.

Moreover, they fight with great perseverance, for the text says, “*Ye fight and war.*” Now, war is a continuation of the act of fighting, prolonging it from campaign to campaign, and conducting it by the rules of military art till the victory is won. Multitudes of men are living for themselves, competing here and warring there, fighting for their own hand with the utmost perseverance. They have little choice as to how they will do it. Conscience is not allowed to interfere in their transactions, but the old advice rings in their ears, “Get money, get money honestly if you can, but by any means get money.” No matter though body and soul be ruined, and others be deluged with misery, fight on, for there is no discharge in this war. If you are to win you must fight, and everything is fair in war. So they muster their forces, they struggle with their fellows, they make the battle of life hotter and hotter, they banish love, and brand tenderness as folly, and yet with all their schemes they obtain not the end of life in any true sense. Well says James, “*Ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain; ye fight and war, yet ye have not.*”

When men who are greatly set upon their selfish purposes do not succeed they may possibly hear that the reason of their non-success is “*Because ye ask not.*” Is, then, success to be achieved by asking? So the text seems to hint, and so the

righteous find it. Why does not this man of intense desires take to asking? The reason is, first, because it is unnatural to the natural man to pray, as well expect him to fly. He despises the idea of supplication. "Pray?" says he. "No, I want to be at work. I cannot waste time on devotions, prayers are not practical, I want to fight my way. While you are praying I shall have beaten my opponent. I go to my counting house, and leave you to your Bibles and your prayers." He has no mind for asking of God. He declares that none but canting hypocrites care to pray, thus confessing that if he were to pray, he would be a canting hypocrite. As for him, his praying is of quite another sort, and woe to those who come into his clutches, they will find that with him business is business, and pretty sharp business too. He will never stoop to pray, He is too proud. God's reliance he does not understand, self-reliance is his word. Self is his god, and to his god he looks for success. He is so proud that he reckons himself to be his own providence, his own right hand and his active arm shall get to him the victory. When he is very liberal in his views he admits that though he does not pray, yet there may be some good in it, for it quiets people's minds, and makes them more comfortable, but as to any answer ever coming from prayer, he scouts the idea, and talks both philosophically and theologically about the absurdity of supposing that God alters His course of conduct out of respect to the prayers of men and women. "Ridiculous," says he, "utterly ridiculous," and therefore, in his own great wisdom he returns to his fighting and his warring, for by such means he hopes to attain his end. Yet he obtains not. The whole history of mankind shows the failure of evil lustings to obtain their objective.

For a while the carnal man goes on fighting and warring, but by and by he changes his mind, for he is ill, or frightened. His purpose is the same, but if it cannot be achieved one way

he will try another. If he must ask, well, he will ask, he will become religious, and do good to himself in that way. He finds that some religious people prosper in the world, and that even sincere Christians are by no means fools in business, and therefore, he will try their plan.

And now he comes under the third censure of our text, "*Ye ask and receive not.*" What is the reason why the man who is the slave of his lusts obtains not his desire, even when he takes to asking? The reason is because his asking is a mere matter of form, his heart is not in his worship. He buys a book containing what are called forms of prayer, and he repeats these, for repeating is easier than praying, and demands no thought.

I have no objection to your using a form of prayer if you pray with it, but I know a great many who do not pray with it, but only repeat the form. Imagine what would come to our families if instead of our children speaking to us frankly when they have any need they were always to think it requisite to go into the library and hunt up a form of prayer, and read it to us. Surely there would be an end to all home-feeling and love, life would move in fetters. Our household would become a kind of boarding-school, or barracks, and all would be parade and formality, instead of happy eyes looking up with loving trust into fond eyes that delight to respond.

Many spiritual men use a form, but carnal men are pretty sure to do so, for they end in the form. This man's prayer is asking amiss, because it is entirely for himself. He wants to prosper that he may enjoy himself, he wants to be great simply that he may be admired, his prayer begins and ends with self.

Look at the indecency of such a prayer even if it be sincere. When a man so prays he asks God to be his servant, and gratify his desires, nay, worse than that, he wants God to join him in the service of his lusts. He will gratify his lusts, and God shall come and help him to do it. Such prayer is blasphemous, but a

large quantity of it is offered, and it must be one of the most God-provoking things that heaven ever beholds.

No, if a man will live to himself and his lusts, let him do so, and the further he gets off from God the more consistent he will be. Let him not mouth the Lord's prayer as though God were his father, or drag in Christ's sacred name to sanctify his greed, or invoke the Spirit's blessed power in connection with his personal aggrandizement, or his selfish ambition. If he does so, he will be no better off than he was at the beginning, he will ask, and have not. His asking will miss because he asks amiss, that he may consume it upon his lusts.

If your desires are the longings of fallen nature, if your desires begin and end with your own self, and if the chief end for which you live is not to glorify God, but to glorify yourself, then you may fight, but you shall not have, you may rise up early and sit up late, but nothing worth gaining shall come of it. Remember how the Lord has spoken in the thirty-seventh Psalm, "Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."

So much upon the poverty of lusting.

II. Secondly, I have now before me a serious business, and that is, to show **HOW CHRISTIAN CHURCHES MAY SUFFER SPIRITUAL POVERTY**, so that they too "desire to have, and cannot obtain."

Of course the Christian seeks higher things than the worldling, else were he not worthy of that name at all. At least professedly his objective is to obtain the true riches, and to glorify God in spirit and in truth. Yes, but look, dear brethren, all churches do not get what they desire. We have to complain, not here and there, but in many places, of churches that are

nearly asleep, and are gradually declining. Of course they find excuses. The population is dwindling, or another place of worship is attracting the people. There is always an excuse handy when a man wants one, but still there stands the fact—public worship is almost deserted in some places, the ministry has no rallying power about it, and those who put in an appearance are discontented or indifferent.

In such churches there are no conversions. If they had half-a-dozen added to them in a year, they would need to sing the “Hallelujah Chorus,” but as to bringing thousands to Christ, they secretly fear that this would be an undesirable thing, for it might involve excitement, and they are so proper that they dread anything of that sort. To do nothing, and let men be damned, is in their judgment proper and respectable, but to be alive and energetic is a perilous state of affairs, for it might lead to fanaticism and indecorum.

They are especially afraid of anything like “sensationalism.” That ugly-looking word they set before us very much as the Chinese try to frighten their enemies by painting horrible faces on their shields. Never mind that terrible word, it will hurt no one. These churches “have not,” for no truth is made prevalent through their zeal, no sin is smitten, no holiness promoted, nothing is done by which God is glorified. And what is the reason of it?

First, *even among professed Christians, there may be the pursuit of desirable things in a wrong method.* “Ye fight and war, yet ye have not.” Have not churches thought to prosper by competing with other churches? At such and such a place of worship they have a very clever man, we must get a clever man too, in fact, he must be a little cleverer than our neighbor’s hero. That is the thing—a clever man! Ah me, that we should live in an age in which we talk about clever men in preaching the Gospel of

Jesus Christ! Alas, that this holy service should be thought to depend upon human cleverness!

Churches have competed with each other in architecture, in music, in apparel, and in social status. The leaders fancy that to succeed they must have something more handsome, artistic, or expensive than their neighbors, hence they build Gothic edifices in which the minister's voice gets up among the timbers, and is never properly heard, or else they purchase an organ with every stop except the full one. The opinion would seem to be widely spread that there is a deal of grace in an organ. To pray to God with a windmill like the Tartars would be very absurd, but to praise God with wind passing through a set of pipes is eminently proper. I never have seen the distinction, and do not see it now. Organ or no organ is not now the question, but I speak of instances in which these machines are set up as a matter of rivalry. Is it not the design of many to succeed by a finer building, better music, and a cleverer ministry than others? Is it not as much a matter of competition as a shop front and a dressed window are with drapers? Is this the way by which the Kingdom of God is to grow up among us?

In some cases there is a measure of bitterness in the rivalry. It is not pleasant to little minds to see other churches prospering more than their own. They may be more earnest than we are, and be doing God's work better, but we are too apt to turn a jealous eye towards them, and we would rather they did not get on quite so well. Do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The spirit that dwells in us lusteth to envy?" If we could see a disturbance among them, so that they would break up and be ecclesiastically killed, we would not rejoice. Of course not, but neither should we suffer any deadly sorrow. In some churches an evil spirit lingers. I bring no railing accusation, and therefore, say no more than this, God

will never bless such means and such a spirit, those who give way to them will desire to have, but never obtain.

Meanwhile, what is the reason why they do not have a blessing? The text says, "*Because ye ask not.*" I am afraid there are churches which do not ask. Prayer in all forms is too much neglected. Private prayer is allowed to decay. I shall put it to the conscience of every man how far secret prayer is attended to, and how much of fellowship with God there is in secret among the members of our churches. Certainly its healthy existence is vital to church prosperity.

Of family prayer it is easier to judge, for we can see it. I fear that in these days many have quite given up family prayer. I pray you do not imitate them. I wish you were all of the same mind as the Scotch laborer who obtained a situation in the house of a wealthy farmer who was known to pay well, and all his friends envied him that he had gone to live in such a service. In a short time he returned to his native village, and when they asked him why he had left his situation, he replied that he "could not live in a house which had no roof to it." A house without prayer is a house without a roof. We cannot expect blessings on your churches if we have none on your families.

As to the congregational prayer, the gathering together in what we call our prayer meetings, is there not a falling off? In many cases the prayer meeting is despised, and looked down upon as a sort of second-rate gathering. There are members of churches who are never present, and it does not prick their consciences that they stay away. Some congregations mix up the prayer meeting with a lecture, so as to hold only one service in the week.

I read the other day an excuse for all this, it is said that people are better at home, attending to family concerns. This is idle talk, for who among us wishes people to neglect their domestic concerns? It will be found that those attend to their

own concerns best who are diligent to get everything in order, so that they may go out to assemblies for worship. Negligence of the house of God is often an index of negligence of their own houses. They are not bringing their children to Christ, I am persuaded, or they would bring them up to the services. Anyway, the prayers of the church measure its prosperity. If we restrain prayer we restrain the blessing. Our true success as churches can only be had by asking it of the Lord. Are we not prepared to reform and amend in this matter? Oh for Zion's travailing hour to come, when an agony of prayer shall move the whole body of the faithful.

But some reply, "There are prayer meetings, and we do ask for the blessing, and yet it comes not." Is not the explanation to be found in the other part of the text, "*Ye have not, because ye ask amiss*"? When prayer meetings become a mere form, when brethren stand up and waste the time away with their long orations, instead of speaking to God in earnest and burning words, when there is no expectation of a blessing, when the prayer is cold and chill, then nothing will come of it. He who prays without fervency does not pray at all. We cannot commune with God, who is a consuming fire, if there is no fire in our prayers. Many prayers fail of their errand because there is no faith in them. Prayers which are filled with doubt are requests for refusal.

Imagine that you wrote to a friend and said, "Dear friend, I am in great trouble, and I therefore tell you, and ask for your help because it seems right to do so. But though I thus write, I have no belief that you will send me any help, indeed, I should be mightily surprised if you did, and should speak of it as a great wonder." Will you get the help, think you? I should say your friend would be sensible enough to observe the little confidence which you have in him, and he would reply that, as you did not expect anything, he would not astonish you. Your

opinion of his generosity is so low that he does not feel called upon to put himself out of the way on your account. When prayers are of that kind you cannot wonder if we “have not, because we ask amiss.”

Moreover, if our praying, however earnest and believing it may be, is a mere asking that our church may prosper because we want to glory in its prosperity, if we want to see our own denomination largely increased, and its respectability improved, that we may share the honors thereof, then our desires are nothing but lustings after all. Can it be that the children of God manifest the same emulations, jealousies, and ambitious as men of the world? Shall religious work be a matter of rivalry and contest? Ah, then, the prayers which seek success will have no acceptance at the mercy seat. God will not hear us, but bid us be gone, for He cares not for the petitions of which self is the object. “Ye have not, because ye ask not, or because ye ask amiss.”

III. Thirdly, I have a much more pleasing work to do, and that is to hint at **THE WEALTH WHICH AWAITS THE USE OF THE RIGHT MEANS**, namely, of asking rightly of God.

I invite your most solemn attention to this matter, for it is vitally important. And my first observation is this, *how very small after all is this demand which God makes of us*. Ask! Why, it is the least thing He can possibly expect of us, and it is no more than we ordinarily require of those who need help from us. We expect a poor man to ask, and if he does not we lay the blame of his lack upon himself. If God will give for the asking, and we remain poor, who is to blame? Is not the blame most grievous? Does it not look as if we were out of order with God, so that we will not even condescend to ask a favor of Him? Surely, there must be in our hearts a lurking enmity to Him, or else instead of its being an unwelcome necessity it would be regarded as a great delight.

However, brethren, whether we like it or not, remember, *asking is the rule of the kingdom*. “Ask, and ye shall receive.” It is a rule that never will be altered in anybody’s case. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the elder brother of the family, but God has not relaxed the rule for Him. Remember this text, JEHOVAH says to His own Son, “Ask of me and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” If the royal and divine Son of God cannot be exempted from the rule of asking that He may have, you and I cannot expect the rule to be relaxed in our favor. Why should it be?

What reason can be pleaded why we should be exempted from prayer? What argument can there be why we should be deprived of the privilege and delivered from the necessity of supplication? I can see none, can you? God will bless Elijah and send rain on Israel, but Elijah must pray for it. If the chosen nation is to prosper Samuel must plead for it. If the Jews are to be delivered Daniel must intercede. God will bless Paul, and the nations shall be converted through him, but Paul must pray. Pray he did without ceasing, his epistles show that he expected nothing except by asking for it. If you may have everything by asking, and nothing without asking, I beg you to see how absolutely vital prayer is, and I beseech you to abound in it.

Moreover, it is clear to even the shallowest thinker that *there are some things necessary for the church of God which we cannot get otherwise than by prayer*. You can get that clever man I spoke about—the less, perhaps, you pray about him the better, and that new church, and the new organ, and the choir, you can also get without prayer, but you cannot get the heavenly anointing, the gift of God is not to be purchased with money.

Some of the members of a church in a primitive village in America thought that they would raise a congregation by hanging up a very handsome chandelier in the meeting house.

People talked about this chandelier, and some went to see it, but the light of it soon grew dim. You can buy all sorts of ecclesiastical furniture, you can purchase any kind of paint, brass, muslin, blue scarlet, and fine linen, together with flutes, harps, sackbuts, psalteries, and all kinds of music—you can get these without prayer, in fact, it would be an impertinence to pray about such rubbish, but you cannot get the Holy Ghost without prayer. “He bloweth where He listeth.” He will not be brought near by any process or method at our command apart from asking. There are no mechanical means which will make up for His absence.

If the Holy Spirit be not there, what is the use of that clever man of yours? Will anybody be converted? Will any soul be comforted? Will any children of God be renewed in spiritual life without the Holy Spirit? Neither can you get communion with God without prayer. He that will not pray cannot have communion with God. Yet more, there is no real spiritual communion of the church with its own members when prayer is suspended. Prayer must be in action, or else those blessings which are vitally essential to the success of the church can never come to it. Prayer is the great door of spiritual blessing, and if you close it you shut out the favor.

Beloved brethren, do you not think that *this asking which God requires is a very great privilege?* Suppose there were an edict published that you must not pray, that would be a hardship indeed. If prayer rather interrupted than increased the stream of blessing, it would be a sad calamity.

Did you ever see a dumb man under a strong excitement, or suffering great pain, and therefore anxious to speak? It is a terrible sight to see, the face is distorted, the body is fearfully agitated, the mute writhes and labors in dire distress. Every limb is contorted with a desire to help the tongue, but it cannot break its bonds. Hollow sounds come from the breast, and

stuttering of ineffectual speech awaken attention, though they cannot reach so far as expression. The poor creature is in pain unspeakable. Suppose we were in our spiritual nature full of strong desires, and yet dumb as to the tongue of prayer, I think it would be one of the direst afflictions that could possibly befall us, we should be terribly maimed and dismembered, and our agony would be overwhelming. Blessed be His name, the Lord ordains a way of utterance, and bids our heart speak out to Him.

Beloved, we must pray, it seems to me that *it ought to be the first thing* we ever think of doing when in need. If men were right with God, and loved Him truly, they would pray as naturally as they breathe. I hope some of us are right with God, and do not need to be driven to prayer, for it has become an instinct of our nature.

I was told by a friend yesterday the story of a little German boy, a story which his pastor loved to tell. The dear little child believed his God, and delighted in prayer. His schoolmaster had urged the scholars to be at school in time, and this child always tried to be so, but his father and mother were dilatory people, and one morning, through their fault alone, he just left the door as the clock struck the hour for the school to open. A friend standing near heard the little one cry, "Dear God, do grant I may be in time for school." It struck the listener that for once prayer could not be heard, for the child had quite a little walk before him, and the hour was already come. He was curious to see the result.

Now it so happened this morning that the master, in trying to open the schoolhouse door, turned the key the wrong way, and could not stir the bolt, and they had to send for a smith to open the door. Hence a delay, and just as the door opened our little friend entered with the rest, all in good time. God has many ways of granting right desires. It was most natural that

instead of crying and whining a child that really loved God should speak to Him about his trouble. Should it not be natural to you and to me, spontaneously and at once to tell the Lord our sorrows and ask for help? Should not this be the first resort?

Alas, according to Scripture and observation, and I grieve to add, according to experience, *prayer is often the last thing*. Look at the sick man in the one hundred and seventh Psalm. Friends bring him various foods, but his soul abhorreth all manner of meat, the physicians do what they can to heal him, but he grows worse and worse, and draws nigh to the gates of death, “Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble.” That was put last which should have been first. “Send for the doctor. Prepare him nourishment. Wrap him in flannels!” All very well, but when will you pray to God? God will be called upon when the case grows desperate.

Look at the mariners described in the same psalm. The barque is well-nigh wrecked. “They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble.” Still they do all they can to ride out the storm, but when “they reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit’s end: then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble.” Oh, yes, God is sought unto when we are driven into a corner and ready to perish. And what a mercy it is that He hears such laggard prayers, and delivers the suppliants out of their troubles. But ought it to be so with you and with me, and with churches of Christ? Ought not the first impulse of a declining church to be, “Let us pray day and night until the Lord appears for us, let us meet together with one accord in one place, and never separate until the blessing descends upon us”?

Do you know, brothers, *what great things are to be had for the asking?* Have you ever thought of it? Does it not stimulate you to pray fervently? All heaven lies before the grasp of the asking

man, all the promises of God are rich and inexhaustible, and their fulfillment is to be had by prayer. Jesus says, “All things are delivered unto me of my Father,” and Paul says, “All things are yours, and you are Christ’s.” Who would not pray when all things are thus handed over to us? Ay, and promises that were first made to special individuals, are all made to us if we know how to plead them in prayer.

Israel went through the Red Sea ages ago, and yet we read in the sixty-sixth Psalm, “There did we rejoice in him.” Only Jacob was present at Peniel, and yet Hosea says, “There he spake with us.” Paul wants to give us a great promise for times of need, and he quotes from the Old Testament, “For he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” Where did Paul get that? That is the assurance which the Lord gave to Joshua, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” Surely the promise was for Joshua only. No, it is for us. “No Scripture is of private interpretation,” all Scripture is ours.

See how God appears unto Solomon at night, and he says, “Ask what I shall give thee.” Solomon asks for wisdom. “Oh, that is Solomon,” say you. Listen. “If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God.” God gave Solomon wealth, and fame into the bargain. Is not that peculiar to Solomon? No, for it is said of true wisdom, “Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honor,” and is not this much like our Savior’s words, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you”?

Thus you see the Lord’s promises have many fulfillments, and they are waiting now to pour their treasures into the lap of prayer. Does not this lift prayer up to a high level, when God is willing to repeat the biographies of His saints in us, when He is waiting to be gracious, and to load us with His benefits?

I will mention another truth which ought to make us pray, and that is, that *if we ask, God will give to us much more than we ask.*

Abraham asked of God that Ishmael might live before Him. He thought “Surely this is the promised seed: I cannot expect that Sarah will bear a child in her old age. God has promised me a seed, and surely it must be this child of Hagar. Oh that Ishmael might live before thee.” God granted him that, but He gave him Isaac as well, and all the blessings of the covenant.

There is Jacob, he kneels down to pray, and asks the Lord to give him bread to eat and raiment to put on. But what did his God give him? When he came back to Bethel he had two bands, thousands of sheep and camels, and much wealth. God had heard him and done exceeding abundantly above what he asked.

It is said of David, “The king asked life of thee, and thou gave him length of days,” yea, gave him not only length of days himself, but a throne for his sons throughout all generations, till David went in and sat before the Lord, overpowered with the Lord’s goodness.

“Well,” say you, “but is that true of New Testament prayers?” Yes, it is so with the New Testament pleaders, whether saints or sinners. They brought a man to Christ sick of the palsy, and asked Him to heal him, and He said, “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.” He had not asked that, had he? No, but God gives greater things than we ask for. Hear that poor, dying thief’s humble prayer, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” Jesus replies, “Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise.” He had not dreamed of such an honor.

Even the story of the Prodigal teaches us this. He resolved to say, “I am not worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.” What is the answer? “This my son was dead, and is alive again: bring forth the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his hands, and shoes on his feet.”

Once get into the position of an asker, and you shall have what you never asked for, and never thought to receive. The

text is often misquoted, “God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we *can* ask, or even think.” We *could* ask, if we were but more sensible and had more faith, for the very greatest things, but God is willing to give us infinitely more than we ask.

At this moment I believe that God’s church might have inconceivable blessings if she were but ready now to pray. Did you ever notice that wonderful picture in the eighth chapter of Revelation? It is worthy of careful notice. I shall not attempt to explain it in its connection, but merely point to the picture as it hangs on the wall by itself.

Read on — “When he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.” Silence in heaven, there were no anthems, no hallelujahs, not an angel stirred a wing. Silence in heaven! Can you imagine it? And look! You see seven angels standing before God, and to them are given seven trumpets. There they wait, trumpet in hand, but there is no sound. Not a single note of cheer or warning during an interval which was sufficiently long to provoke lively emotion, but short enough to prevent impatience. Silence unbroken, profound, awful reigned in heaven.

Action is suspended in heaven, the center of all activity. “And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer.” There he stands, but no offering is presented, everything has come to a standstill. What can possibly set it in motion? “And there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.” Prayer is presented together with the merit of the Lord Jesus.

Now, see what will happen. “And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel’s hands.” That is the key of the whole matter. Now you will see, the angel begins to work, he takes

the censer, fills it with the altar fire, and flings it down upon the earth, “and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and earthquake.” “And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.” Everything is moving now. As soon as the prayers of the saints were mixed with the incense of Christ’s eternal merit, and begun to smoke up from the altar, then prayer became effectual. Down fell the living coals among the sons of men, while the angels of the divine providence, who stood still before, sound their thunder blasts, and the will of the Lord is done.

Such is the scene in heaven in a certain measure even to this day. Bring hither the incense. Bring hither the prayers of the saints! Set them on fire with Christ’s merits, and on the golden altar let them smoke before the Most High, then shall we see the Lord at work, and His will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. God send His blessing with these words, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

1683 THE GREAT CROSS-BEARER – MARK 15:20

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, October 8, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him. — Mark 15:20

And he bearing his cross went forth. — John 19:17

And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross. — Mark 15:21

[Scripture Read before Sermon — Mark 15:15-39]

WHEN OUR LORD HAD BEEN CONDEMNED to die, the execution of His sentence was hurried. The Jews were in great haste to shed His blood, so intense was the enmity of the chief priests and Pharisees that every moment of delay was wearisome to them. Besides, it was the day of the Passover, and they wished to have this matter finished before they went with hypocritical piety to celebrate the festival of Israel's deliverance.

We do not wonder at their eagerness, for they could not bear themselves while He lived, since His very presence reproved them for their falsehood and hypocrisy. But at Pilate we do wonder, and herein he is much to be blamed. In all civilized countries there is usually an interval between the

sentencing of the prisoner and the time of his putting to death. As the capital sentence is irreversible, it is well to have a little space in which possible evidence may be forthcoming, which may prevent the fatal stroke. In some countries we have thought that there has been a cruelly long delay between the sentence and the execution, but with the Romans it was usual to allow the reasonable respite of ten days.

Now, I do not say that it was incumbent upon Pilate according to Roman law to have allowed ten days to a Jew, who had not the rights of Roman citizenship, but I do say that he might have pleaded the custom of his country, and so have secured a delay, and afterwards he might have released his prisoner. It was within his reach to have done so, and he was culpable, as he was all along, in thus yielding to the clamor for an immediate execution for no other reason than this, that he was “willing to content the people.” When once we begin to make the wishes of other men our law we know not to what extremity of criminality we may be led, and so the Savior’s hasty execution is due to Pilate’s vacillating spirit, and to the insatiable blood-thirstiness of the scribes and Pharisees.

Being given over to death, our Savior was led away, and I suppose the painters are right when they put a rope about His neck or His loins, for the idea of being *led* in an open street would seem to imply some sort of bond, “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter.” Alas, that the Emancipator of our race should be led forth as a captive to die!

The direction in which He is led is outside the city. He must not die in Jerusalem, though multitudes of prophets had perished there. Though the temple was the central place of sacrifice, yet must not the Son of God be offered there, for He was an offering of another kind, and must not lie upon their altars. Outside the city, because by the Jews He was treated as a flagrant offender who must be executed at the Tyburn of the

city, in the appointed place of doom known as Calvary or Golgotha.

When Naboth was unjustly condemned for blasphemy, they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones that he died, and afterwards Stephen—when they cried out against him as a blasphemer, they cast him out of the city, and there they stoned him. Our Savior therefore must die in the ordinary place of execution, that in all respects He might be numbered with the transgressors. The rulers of the city so loathed and detested their great Reprover that they rejected Him, and would not suffer Him to die within their city walls. Alas, poor Jerusalem, in casting out the Son of David, you did cast out your last hope, now are you bound over to desolation.

He was led outside of the city because from that time no acceptable sacrifice could be offered there. They might go on with their offering of daily lambs, and they might sacrifice their bullocks, and burn the fat of fed beasts, but from that day the substance of the sacrifice had gone away from them, and Israel's offerings were vain oblations. Because the true sacrifice is rejected of them the Lord leaves them nothing but a vain show.

Still more forcible is the fact that our Lord must die outside the city because He was to be consumed as a sin-offering. It is written in the law, "And the skin of the bullock, and all his flesh, with his head, and with his legs, and his inwards, and his dung, even the whole bullock shall he carry forth outside the camp unto a clean place, where the ashes are poured out, and burn him on the wood with fire."

There were several sorts of offerings under the law, the sweet-savor offerings were presented upon the altar, and were accepted of God, but sin-offerings were burnt without the camp or gate, because God can have no fellowship with sin. Once let sin be imputed to the sacrifice and it becomes

abhorrent to God, and must not be presented in the tabernacle or the temple, but burned outside the circle wherein His people have their habitations. And here let our hearts gratefully contemplate how truly our Lord Jesus became a sin-offering for us, and how in every point He followed out the type. With His face turned away from His Father's house He must go to die, with His face turned away from what were once His Father's people He must be led forth to be crucified. Like a thing accursed, He is to be hung up where felons suffer condign punishment.

Because we were sinners, and because sin had turned our backs to God, and because sin had broken our communion with God's accepted ones, therefore must He endure this banishment. In that sorrowful march of the cross-bearing Savior my soul with sorrow sees herself represented as deserving thus to be made to depart unto death, and yet joy mingles with this emotion, for the glorious Sin-bearer has thus taken away our sin, and we return from our exile, His substitution is infinitely effectual. Well may those live for whom Jesus died. Well may those return in whose place the Son of God was banished. There is entrance into the holy city now, there is entrance into the temple now, and there is access unto God Himself now, because the Lord has put away our sin through Him who was led to be crucified outside the city gate.

Nor do I think that even this exhausts the teaching. Jesus dies outside Jerusalem because He died, not for Jerusalem alone, nor for Israel alone. The effect of His atonement is not circumscribed by the walls of a city nor by the bounds of a race. In Him shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. Out in the open He must die, to show that He reconciled both Jews and Gentiles unto God, "For he is the propitiation for our sins," says Paul, who was himself a Jew, "and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Had He been the Savior

of Jews only, seclusion in the place of His offering would have been appropriate, but as He dies for all nations, He is hung up without the city.

And yet, once more, He suffered outside the gate that we might go forth unto Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. “Come you out from among them; be you separate, touch not the unclean thing,” henceforth becomes the command of God to all His sons and daughters, behold the Son of sons, His Only-begotten, leads the way in nonconformity to this present evil world, being Himself officially severed from the old Jewish church, whose elders seek His life. He dies in sacred separation from the false and corrupt corporation which vaunted itself to be the chosen of God. He protested against all evil, and for this He died, so far as His murderers were concerned.

Even so must His followers take up their cross and follow Him whithersoever He goes, even though it be to be despised and rejected of men. See what instruction is found in the choice of the place wherein our great Redeemer offers Himself unto God.

I. Let us draw near to our Lord for awhile, and carefully observe each instructive detail. Our imagination pictures the Blessed One standing outside the gate of Herod's palace in the custody of a band of soldiers with a centurion at their head, and we begin at once to observe **HIS DRESS**.

That may seem a small matter, but it is not without instruction. How is He dressed? Our text tells us that when they had mocked Him they took off the purple from Him and put His own clothes on Him, but we are not told that they took off *the crown of thorns*, and hence it has been currently believed that He continued to wear it to the cross and on the cross. Is not this highly probable? Surely if the thorny crown had been withdrawn this would have been the place to have said, “They

took off the purple from Him and removed the crown of thorns,” but it is not so written, and therefore we may believe that the sorrowful coronet remained upon Him.

Pilate wrote upon his accusation, “the King of the Jews,” and it was not unfitting that He should continue to wear a crown. Jesus died a crowned monarch, king of the curse. The Lord God in justice said to rebel man, “Cursed is the ground for your sake: thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to you,” and lo, the man by whom we are redeemed is crowned with that product of the earth which came of the curse.

“O sacred head surrounded
By crown of piercing thorn;
O bleeding head, so wounded,
Reviled and put to scorn.”

Probably also, as I have said, He was *bound*, for they led Him as a sheep to the slaughter. But this binding was probably more abundant than that which we have hinted at, if it be indeed true that by Roman custom criminals were bound with cords to the cross which they were doomed to carry. If this was the case, you may picture our Lord with His cross bound to Himself, and hear Him say, “Bind the sacrifice with cords, even to the horns of the altar.”

But the chief point to be noted is that Jesus *wore His own clothes*, the usual garments which He was accustomed to wear, and this no doubt for identification, that all who looked on might know that it was the same person who had preached in their streets and had healed their sick. They were under no misapprehension, they knew that it was Jesus of Nazareth, the keen hate of the scribes and Pharisees would not have permitted any substitution of another. It was none other than He, and His garments were the ensigns of that truth.

He wore His own clothes also for another reason, namely, that there might be a fulfillment of prophecy. It may not strike you at first, but you will soon see it. Our Lord must not go to die in the purple, He must march to the cross in that vestment which was without seam and woven from the top throughout, or else the word could not have been fulfilled, "They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots." Other raiment could readily have been rent and divided, but this garment, which was peculiar to the Savior, could not have been so rent without destroying it, and therefore the soldiers cast lots for it. Little did they who put it on Him, dream that they were thus accessory to the fulfillment of a prophecy.

Does it not strike you as strange that the Pharisees, who were so full of hatred to Christ, did not carefully draw back from the fulfillment of so many types and prophecies? Their rabbis and teachers knew the prophecy of Zechariah that the Messiah should be sold for thirty pieces of silver, why did it not occur to them to make their bribe to Judas twenty-nine or thirty-one silver pieces? Why, again, did they cast the price unto the potter by buying from him the field of blood? Could they not, so to speak, have balked the prophecy thereby?

Here were voluntarily fulfilled by themselves prophecies which condemned them. I shall have to show you the same thing further on, but meanwhile observe that if it had been their objective to fulfill type and prophecy they could not have acted more carefully than they did. So they put His own garments on Him, and unwittingly furnished the possibility for the fulfillment of the prophet's word, "They parted my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture."

To me there occurs one other thought touching His wearing His own garments. I do not know if I can express it, but it seems to me to indicate that our Lord's passion was a true and natural part of His life, He died as He lived. His death

was not a new departure, but the completion of a life of selfsacrifice, and so He had no need to put on a fresh garb. Look! He goes to die in His ordinary everyday garments!

Does not it almost seem as if people put on their Sunday clothes because they regard religion as something quite distinct from their common life? Do you not wish to see godliness in work-day clothes? religion in its shirt-sleeves? grace in a smock-frock? Do you not almost cry concerning some loud talkers—“Put his own clothes on him, and then lead him out and let us see him”? It should be an integral part of our life to live and to die for our God. Must we become other men if we are to be God’s men? Can we not wear our own clothes, habits, characteristics, and peculiarities and serve the Lord? Is there not some suspicion of unnaturalness in services which require men to put on a strange, outlandish dress? Surely they find their worship to be on another level than their life, they must step out of their way and dress up to attend to it.

It is ill for a man when he cannot lead his fellows in prayer till he has gone to the wardrobe. Time was when vestments meant something, but ever since our great High Priest went up to His one sacrifice wearing His common clothes, all types are fulfilled and laid aside.

Now, we pray not officially, or we should need the robe, but we pray personally, and our own clothes suit us well. Jesus continued the unity of His life as He approached its close, and did not even in appearance change His way, He lived to die a sacrifice, this was the climax of His life, the apex of the towering pyramid of His perfect obedience. No mark is set, no line is drawn between His passion and all the rest of His life, nor should there be, a screen between our life and death.

Somehow, I dread a death which is meant to be pictorial and exhibitional. I am not an admirer of Addison’s death, as some are, who praise him because he sent for a young lord and

cried, “Come, see how a Christian can die!” I like better, Bengel’s wish when he desired to die just as a person would slip out from company because someone beckoned him outside. Such a person modestly thinking his presence or absence to be of small account in a great world, quietly withdraws, and only friends observe that he is gone.

Death should be part of the usual curriculum, the close of the day’s work, the entrance into harbor which ends the voyage. It is well to feel that you can die easily, because you have done it so many times before. He who dies daily will not fear to die. Bathe in the Jordan often, and you will not dread the fording of it when your hour has come. Our blessed Lord lived such a dying life that He made no show of death, He did not change His tone and spirit any more than His garments, but died as He lived. They put His own clothes on Him, He had not Himself taken them off, it was no wish of His to wear the purple even for an hour either in reality or in mockery. He was evermore the same, and His own vesture best beseemed Him.

Truly, blessed Master, we may well say, “All your garments smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia,” even though they take You not out of “the ivory palaces wherein they have made you glad,” but out of the common guard room, where they had made You to be despised and mocked and spit upon. Come from whence You may, Your vesture has a fragrant smell about it, and all Your brethren rejoice therein.

II. Brethren, I beg you for a few minutes to look at **HIS COMPANY.**

Who were they that were with our Lord when He came to die? First and nearest to Him were *the rough Roman soldiers*, strong, muscular, unfeeling men, ready to shed blood at any moment. In them human affection was kept down by stern discipline, they were the iron instruments of an empire of iron. They would do what they were bidden, and feeling and

sympathy were not allowed to interfere. I do but bid you look at these guards to remind you that from beneath their eagle our Savior won a trophy, for their centurion at our Lord's death uttered the confession, "Certainly this was the Son of God." This was a blessed confession of faith, and I delight to think of our Lord as thus becoming the conqueror of His conquerors by taking one out of them to be His disciple and witness, as we would fain believe he was. Surely after openly making the clear confession which the evangelist has recorded we may number him with believers.

Next to these guards were *two malefactors*, led out with Him to execution. That was intended to increase His scorn. He must not be separated from the basest of men, but He must be led forth between two thieves, having previously had a murderer preferred to Him. They seem to have been very hardened scoundrels, for they reviled Him. I mention them because our Lord won a trophy by the conversion of one of them, who dying said, "We suffer justly, but this man has done nothing amiss," and then prayed, "Lord, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."

This dying thief has brought more glory to Christ than hundreds of us, for in every place wherever this gospel has been preached this has been told as a memorial of him, and as a comfort to the guiltiest to look to Jesus. In the act of death he believed in Christ, and believed when the Lord Himself was in the act of death, and that day he was with Him in paradise. How have You conquered, O You despised of men! How have You won by Your gentleness both Roman legionnaires and Jewish thieves.

Beyond the prisoners were the *scribes and Pharisees, and high priests*. I could not picture their faces, but surely they must have been about the worst lot of human physiognomies that were ever seen, as with a fiendish delight they stared at Jesus. He had

called them “hypocrites,” He had spoken of them as “making clean the outside of the cup and platter,” while their inner part was wickedness, and now they are showing their venom and silencing His reproofs.

But their hate was so insatiable that it was accompanied with fear, and that night it was seen that Christ had conquered them, for they crouched before Pilate and begged a guard to prevent their victim from leaving the tomb. In their heart of hearts they feared that after all He might be the Son of God. Thus they were also vanquished, though to them the Lord Jesus was a savor of death unto death, yet they could not but be affected by Him and vanquished by His death. Their hate brought with it alarm, and fear, and agitation, they trembled before the Nazarene.

Look at the scene! Though the despised and sorrowful One is bowed down beneath His cross you can see at a glance the majesty which dwells in Him, but as you look at *them*, the mean, wretched seed of the serpent, they seem to go upon their bellies, and dust is their meat. He is all truth and openness, and they are all cunning and craft. You can see at a glance that as an angel is to the fiends of hell, so is the Christ to His persecutors. That face distained with spittle, and blackened with blows, and encinctured with thorns wears a more than imperial glory, while their faces are as the countenances of slaves and criminals.

Around these there is a *great rabble*, and if you look into the mob you see with surprise that they are the same crowd, who a week ago shouted “Hosanna! Hosanna!” They have changed their note and cry, “Crucify Him, crucify Him,” for a few pence they were bribed to do so, they were an ignorant, fickle mob. When such do hiss at you for doing right, forgive them. When they point the finger of scorn at you for being a Christian, regard them not. It little boots what they may say or do, they yelled at Him who was their best Benefactor and ours. The

Lord Christ endured the popular scorn as He had once received the popular acclamation. He lived above it all, for He knew that men of low degree are vanity. “Vanity of vanities,” all that comes of vain man is vanity.

Ay, but there was a little change for the better in the company, there was just a streak of light in that cloud, for *kindly women* were in the throng. These were not all His disciples, perhaps few of them were such, for otherwise He would not have bidden them weep over a woe which His disciples escaped, but they were tender-hearted women who could not look upon Him without tears, it is said by Luke that they bewailed and lamented Him. They knew how innocent He was, and how kind He had been. Perhaps some of them had received favors at His hands, and therefore they wept sore that He should die. It was well done of them.

In all the evangelists there is no instance of a woman that had any hand in the death of Christ. As far as they are connected with the matter they are guiltless, they rather oppose His death than promote it. Woman was last at the cross and first at the sepulcher, and therefore we can never say a word about her being the first in the transgression. Oh, kindly eyes that gave the Lord of love the tribute of their pity! Blessed be you of compassionate heaven!

But the Savior desired not at that time that human sympathy should be spent upon Him, for His great heart was big with sorrows not His own. He knew that when the children of those women had grown up, and while yet some of the younger women would still be alive, their awful woe would make them exclaim, “Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bear, and the paps that never gave suck.” When they saw the slain of the Romans, and the slain of their own contending factions then they would mourn. The Master therefore said —

“Weep not for Me! Oh! Weep not, Salem’s daughters,
Faint though you see Me, stay the bursting tear;
Turn the sad tide—the tide of bitter waters—
Back on yourselves for desolation near.”

It was well on the woman’s part, it was better still, on His, that He gently set the draught of sympathy to one side, because their coming sorrow oppressed Him more deeply than His own.

We must now leave the company, but not till we have asked, Where are His disciples? Where is Peter? Did he not say, “I will go with you to prison and to death”? Where is John? Where are they all? They have fled, and have not yet returned to speak a word to Him or for Him. Holy women are gathering, but where are the men? Though the women are brave and act like men, the men are fearful and act as women. We are poor helpers to our Master. Had we been there, we should have done the same as they did, if not worse, for they were the flower of our Israel. Ah me, how little worth are we for whom the Ever-blessed paid so much! Let us give clearer proof of loyalty, and follow our Prince more closely.

III. But now, come closer to the Savior, break through the company, and hear my third talk with you while you look a little on **HIS BURDEN**.

May the good Spirit teach me how to depict my Lord. We are told by John that our Savior “went forth bearing his cross.” We might have supposed, so far as the other three evangelists are concerned, that Simon the Cyrenian had carried the cross all the way, but John fills up the blank space in their accounts. Our Lord carried His own cross at the commencement of the sorrowful pilgrimage to Calvary.

This was done, first, by way of increasing His *shame*. It was a custom of the Romans to make felons bear their own gibbet,

and there is a word in the Latin, *furcifer*, which signifies “gallows bearer,” which was hissed at men in contempt, just as nowadays a despised individual might be called a “gallows-bird.” Nothing was more disgraceful, and therefore that must be added to the Redeemer’s load of shame. He made Himself of no reputation for our sakes.

Note, next, its *weight*, usually only one beam of the cross was carried, it may have been so now. It does not look so, however, for the expression, “bearing his cross,” would naturally mean the whole of it. It is highly probable that, although that load could easily be borne by the rough, coarse criminals who ordinarily suffered, yet not so readily by the tender and more exquisite frame of our divine Lord. It is difficult to find any other reason why they should have laid the cross on Simon, unless it be true, as tradition says, that He fainted beneath the burden.

I care nothing for tradition, nor even for conjecture, but still there must have been a reason, and as we cannot believe that these people had any real mercy for Christ, we think they must have acted upon the cruel wish that He might not die on the road, but might at least live to be nailed to the tree. “The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.” This I leave.

And now I call your attention to the fact that there was *typical evidence* about this. If Simon had carried Christ’s cross all the way, we should have missed the type of Isaac, for Isaac when he went to Mount Moriah to be offered up by his father carried the wood for his own sacrifice. I think if I had been a Jew, full of hate to Jesus Christ, I would have said, “Do not let Him carry His cross, that will be too much like Isaac carrying the wood.” No, but knowing the type, they wantonly fulfill it. It is their own will that does it, and yet the predestination of the Eternal is fulfilled in every jot and tittle, and our great Isaac carries the wood with which He is to be offered up by His

Father. How marvelous it is that there should be a fixed decree and yet an altogether unlimited free agency.

The *spiritual meaning* of it, of course, was that Christ in perfect obedience was then carrying the load of our disobedience. The cross, which was the curse, for “Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree,” is borne on those blessed shoulders which were submissive to the will of God in all things. Our Lord’s cross-bearing is the representation of His bearing all our sin, and therefore in it we rejoice.

It also has a *prophetic meaning*, that cross which He carried through Jerusalem shall go through Jerusalem again. It is His great weapon with which He conquers and wins the world, it is His scepter with which He shall rule, governing the hearts of His people by no more forceful means than by the love manifested on His cross. “The government shall be upon his shoulder,” that which He bore on His shoulder shall win obedience, and they that take His yoke upon them shall find rest unto their souls.

IV. I wish I had an hour during which I might speak upon the last head, which bristles with points of interest, but I must give its lessons to you rather in rough remarks than in studied observations.

The last thing to consider is **HIS CROSS-BEARER.**

We are not told why the Roman soldiers laid the cross on Simon. We have made a conjecture, but we leave it as a conjecture, although a highly probable one. If it be true, it lets us see how truly human our Master was. He had been all night in the garden, sweating as it were great drops of blood in His anguish, He had been before the Sanhedrin, He had been before Pilate, then before Herod, then before Pilate again, He had endured scourging, He had been mocked by the soldiery, and it would have been a great wonder if His human frame had not shown some sign of exhaustion.

Holy Scripture, by its example, teaches us great reticence about the sufferings of Jesus. Some of the medieval writers and certain good people who write devotional books are too apt to dilate upon every supposed grief of our Master, so as to harrow up your feelings, but it is the part of wisdom to imitate the ancient painter who, when he depicted Agamemnon as sacrificing his daughter, veiled the father's face.

It is indelicate and almost indecent to write as some have done who would seem to be better acquainted with anatomy than awed by divinity. Much that Jesus endured must forever remain veiled to us, whether He fainted once or twice or thrice, or did not faint at all, we are not informed, and therefore we leave the idea in the obscurity of probability, and reverently worship Him who was tender in body and soul, and suffered even as we do. Oh, love surpassing knowledge which could make Him suffer so!

There was a great singularity in the providence which brought Simon upon the scene just when he appeared. The right man came forward at the right moment. That Simon did not come at first, and that they did not place the cross on him from the beginning was for the fulfillment of the type of Isaac to which allusion has been made, thus providence arranges all things wisely.

Observe that *Simon was pressed into this duty*. The word used signifies that the person is impressed into the royal service. Simon was a pressed man and probably not a disciple of Christ at the time when he was loaded with the cross. How often has a burden of sorrow been the means of bringing men to the faith of Jesus! He was coming in from the country about some business or other, and they compelled him to bear His cross, impressing him into the service which else he would have shunned, for "he passed by," and would have gone on if he could. Roman soldiers were not accustomed to make many

bones about what they chose to do. It was sufficient for them that he came under their notice, and carry the cross he must.

His name was Simon, and where was that other Simon? What a silent, but strong rebuke this would be to him. Simon Peter, Simon son of Jonas, where were you? Another Simon has taken your place. Sometimes the Lord's servants are backward where they are expected to be forward, and He finds other servitors for the time. If this has ever happened to us it ought gently to rebuke us as long as we live.

Brothers and sisters, keep your places, and let not another Simon occupy your room. It is of Judas that it is said, "His bishopric shall another take," but a true disciple will retain his office. Remember that word of our Lord, "Hold that fast which you have, that no man take your crown." Simon Peter lost a crown here, and another head wore it.

Simon was a Cyrenian—an African—I wonder if he was a black man. In the Acts of the Apostles, at the thirteenth chapter, we find mention of a Simeon that was called Niger, or black. We do not know whether he was the same man or no, but anyhow he was an African, for Cyrene lies just to the west of Egypt, on the southern coast of the Mediterranean. Surely the African has had his full share of cross-bearing for many an age. Oh that the pangs of his sorrow may bring forth a birth of joy! Blessed be he, whether African or Englishman, or who he may, that has the honor of bearing the cross after Christ.

He was coming in from the country. How often the Lord takes into His service the unsophisticated country people who as yet are untainted by the cunning and the vice of the city. Some young man is just come up from the country this very week, and is commencing his apprenticeship in London. How I wish my Master would impress him at the city gates, and do it in that divine way of His to which the will of the impressed person yields a sweet consent. Would God you would come at once

and take up the cross of Jesus just at the city gate, before you learn the city's sin and plunge into its dangers. Happy is the Simon coming in from the country who shall this day be led to bear Christ's cross. Good Master, fulfill our heart's desire, and lay Your cross on some unaccustomed shoulder even now.

We are told he was *the father of Alexander and Rufus*. Which, my brethren, is the greater honor to a man, to have a good father, or to be the father of good sons? Under the Old Testament rule we usually read of a man that he is the son of such a one, but here we come to another style, and find it to a man's honor that he is the father of certain well-known brethren—"the father of Alexander and Rufus." Surely, Mark knew these two sons, or he would not have cared to mention them, they must have been familiar to the church, or he would not have thus described their father. It was their father who carried the cross. It is exceedingly likely that this Rufus was he of whom Paul speaks in the last chapter of his epistle to the Romans, for Mark was with Paul, and by this means knew Simon and Rufus.

Paul writes, "Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine." His mother was such a motherly person that she had been a mother to Paul as well as to Rufus. Surely, if she was a mother to Paul, she was another disciple of Jesus, and it would look as if this man, his wife, and his two sons all became converts to our Lord after he had carried His cross. It is certainly not the most unlikely circumstance that has been accepted by us on the ground of probability. Oh, what a blessing to a man to be known by his sons! Pray, dear Christian friends, you that have an Alexander and a Rufus, that it may be an honor to you to be known as their father.

"Him they compelled to bear his cross"—perhaps the heavier end of it, if it was really bound to Christ, as they say, or as I judge, the whole of it. It matters little how it was, but Simon

is the representative of the church which follows Christ bearing His cross. Here we may recall the language of Paul, “I fill up that which is behind,” may I paraphrase it? — I take the hinder end — “of the sufferings of Christ for His body’s sake, that is the church.” Everyone that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution. Jesus said, “Whosoever does not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.” Here is a representative, then, of all the godly—this Simon bearing Christ’s cross.

Mark, it was not a cross of his own making, like those of monks and nuns who put themselves to pains of their own inventing. It was Christ’s cross, and he carried it not before Christ, as some do who talk of their poverty as though it would get them to heaven, instead of resting on Christ’s cross. He carried it after Christ in its right place. This is the order—Christ in front bearing all our sin, and we behind enduring shame and reproach for Him, and counting it greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt.

There is Simon, and we will view him as a lesson to ourselves. First, let Simon be an example to us all, and let us readily take up the cross after Christ. Whatever is involved in being a Christian, rejoice at it. If there be any shame, if there is any contumely, if there be any loss, if there be any suffering, even if it were martyrdom, yet gladly take up the cross. Behold, the Father lays it upon you for Christ’s sake.

The next is advice to any of you that have been compelled to suffer as Christians though you are not Christians. I wonder whether there is anybody here who is only a press-man and yet has to bear the cross. A working man became a teetotaler, he did not mean to be a Christian, but when he went to work his mates tempted him to drink, and as he would not join them they attacked him as a Christian, and said, “You are one of those canting hypocrites, those Wesleyans, those Presbyterians,

or those Spurgeonites!” This is not true of you, but thus you see the cross is forced on you, had you not better take it up and bear it joyfully? They have pressed you into this service, take it as an index of the will of providence, and say, “I will not be a press-man only, I will be a volunteer, and I will cheerfully carry Christ’s cross.”

I know a man who merely comes to this place of worship because he is somewhat interested with the preaching, though he has no idea of being a converted man, yet in the street where he lives nobody ever goes to a place of worship, and therefore they set him down as a pious man, and some have even ridiculed him for it. Friend, you are in for it because you attend here, and you put me in for it too, for if you do anything wrong they are sure to lay all the blame on me. They say—“That is one of Spurgeon’s people.” You are not, I do not own you as yet, but the outsiders have pushed you into the responsibilities of a religious profession, and you had better go in for its privileges. They have laid the cross upon you. Do not throw it off. Come on, and bring that dear motherly wife with you, and Alexander and Rufus too. The church will be glad to take you all in, and then as a volunteer you shall bear Christ’s cross. It is, however, a remarkable thing that some should first of all be forced into it and then become willing followers.

Last of all, if you and I are cross-bearers, here is a sweet thought. Are we carrying a cross which presses us heavily just now? You know you are to be like your Master, and if so there will be someone found to help you bear your cross. They found Simon to bear the cross of Jesus, and there is a Simon somewhere to help you. Only cry to the Lord about it, and He will find you a friend. If Simon is not forthcoming I will tell you what to do. Imitate Simon. If Simon was what I think he was, he became a converted man, and before long found himself in trouble through it, and he at once went to the Lord

in prayer, and said, “Lord Jesus, I am resting in You alone. You did give me the honor to carry *Your* cross once, now, I beseech You, carry mine!”

This is what I want you to do with your crosses at this time. You that have to endure hardness for Christ, and are glad to do it, ask Him to bear your burden for you. He has borne your sins, and if you will but commit your troubles to Him, joy and peace through believing shall stream into your souls by His Holy Spirit. God bless you, for Christ's sake.

1684 “FEED MY LAMBS” – JOHN 21:15

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, October 15, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

So when they had dined, Jesus says to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonas, love you me more than these?”

He said unto him, “Yea, Lord; you know that I love you.”
He said unto him, “Feed my lambs.” — John 21:15

[Scripture Read before Sermon – John 21]

READ THE WHOLE CHAPTER, and observe the change of scene. First, they are on the lake fishing, casting their nets at Christ’s command, and dragging to land a multitude of great fishes. They have all come on shore, and when they have breakfasted, their faces are not turned to the sea, but to the pastures on the hillside. These are clothed with flocks, and the Master says no more about fishermen and fish, but speaks of shepherds and sheep.

Herein lies a parable, the servants of the Lord Jesus are first fishermen, and then shepherds. The first work of Christ’s servants is comprised in that commission, “Go you into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,” or, parabolically, “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught.” They begin their heavenly vocation as fishers, even as Jesus said to them at the first, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

Their earliest work is to preach the Gospel, which is like the letting down of a great seine net, enclosing life of all kinds. They are not to make a selection of characters so as to preach only to likely persons, that would be comparable to angling, a figure which is used in the Old Testament in connection with destruction, and not in reference to salvation, even as Amos says, “The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks.” In Gospel fishing we let down the big net and thus encompass many of all sorts. In the act of preaching the Gospel, all is fish that come to the net, the sorting of the good from the bad is to be done another day.

Our urgent work—I mean yours and mine, my brethren—is to go out into the world and proclaim the blessed Gospel of salvation to all who care to hear us. We are to go into every place to which we can gain access, “into all the world,” “into the streets and lanes of the city, into the highways and hedges,” anywhere and everywhere the world over. Our one instrument as fishers for Christ is the Gospel of the grace of God. God forbid that we should use any other. May the Lord help us to keep to our fishing, and may we come and instantly receive divine direction as to how and where to cast the net, so that we may have a full net, and yet a net unbroken, wherewith we may fish again.

After this is done, and while it is being done, another art is to be practiced. Fishing is not all, as many seem to think. It is a great part of our service, and would God it were more attended to, but after it has been attended to shepherding comes in, and is a work of equal weight. Our Lord Jesus Christ would have His servants attend to this second task with all their hearts. If souls are converted they have been brought up from the depths of sin, and the scene changes, we see a flock, “the church of

God which he has purchased with His own blood." This flock needs as much care as any other, yea, it needs to be tended with the utmost labor and watchfulness.

The Lord Jesus Himself is the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep, the Great Shepherd who is brought again from the dead, and the Chief Shepherd under whom He has appointed shepherds to watch for the souls of men. He will have those of us whom He calls to His service to shepherdize those who are converted, leading, protecting, feeding, comforting, and succoring them. He will call us to account if we neglect this charge, for He will require His flock at our hands, saying, "Where is the flock that was given you, your beautiful flock?"

This shepherd work is so important that three times the Savior bids us attend to it, saying first, "Feed my lambs," then, "Feed my sheep," or as some old manuscripts have it, "my little sheep," and then again, "Feed my sheep." We are to feed the babes in grace, to shepherdize the young men in Christ Jesus, and to feed the older ones who feel many growing infirmities, and need again the comforts of their earliest days. Three times over we are thus bidden, are we, then, so apt to fail in this?

Jesus spoke but once to death, and Lazarus came forth, are we more deaf than the grave, and must we be thrice commanded? Let us no longer be disobedient to the heavenly mandate. We must never so evangelize the outside mass as to forget to fold and feed those within. We are to disciple all nations, and then to teach them all things whatsoever Christ has commanded us.

Not every man that can haul in a net is ready at once to tend a flock, we need much grace, for the Lord Jesus Christ spent years in most industriously educating the twelve, training the seventy, and getting ready a band of followers who were not only saved, but educated, so as to teach others also. We

must not be indifferent to this matter. The quiet work of building up believers must be steadily pursued, even though those who sound a trumpet before them may despise such ministries.

I shall speak this morning upon work within the fold, the feeding of the sheep and lambs, and this I shall do in order that I may help our beloved Sabbath school teachers. This is their day, and if I do not seem to speak directly or exclusively to them, I hope I shall nevertheless say much to stimulate and direct them in their invaluable labors. I bespeak for them your most earnest prayers and loving sympathies, and of many I would beg a more practical cooperation with them.

Concerning this shepherdizing for Christ let us first note *the sphere* — “My lambs,” secondly, *the man* for it — one like Simon son of Jonas, thirdly, *his preparation* for it, fourthly, *the work itself*, and fifthly, *the motive* under which the feeding is to be carried out. Briefly on each point, Oh for help from the Spirit of God!

I. First, think of THE SPHERE.

Although in the other instances Jesus says, “Feed my sheep,” yet in this first instance He says, “Feed my lambs.” To whom does He refer? I think, first, to *such as are little in grace*. They have but a grain of mustard seed of faith as yet, their love is not a flame, but a spark, the leaven of grace within them has begun to work, but all the measures of meal are not yet leavened. The spiritual life in these is like a candle newly lit, apparently in danger of being suddenly blown out, and therefore needing great care.

Weakness is an idea in the word “lambs,” and so in the church of God all such as are weak—and alas, how many there are—all such as are doubting, all such as are slenderly instructed, all such as are easily bewildered in doctrine, cast down in spirit, and apt to be staggered—all such, I say, are to

be watched over with special care, and therefore Jesus mentions them particularly and separately and in the first place. If our kindness should neglect the strong, it would be a sad pity, but it might not entail so much damage as if we neglect the weak. What says the apostle? "Comfort the feeble-minded; support the weak; be patient towards all men."

In our numbers we always have a few who wear the weeds of spiritual widowhood, these are very sincere, but sadly anxious, scarcely knowing what full assurance means, but yet true and resolute. Their faith is a trembling one, crying, "Lord, I believe; help you my unbelief." Such are not to be blamed, nor avoided, nor despised, nor in the least degree discouraged, but inasmuch as we ourselves may also be tempted with like fears, we are to console them.

We ought to know that if we are strong, our strength lies not in ourselves, for our own strength is perfect weakness, and therefore we should deal graciously and tenderly with the weak of the flock. I think this is the reason why the weak were committed to Simon Peter in this particular case, because he had been very weak himself, he had denied his Master through his fears, and thus he was taught to have compassion on other trembling ones. He who is himself compassed with infirmities knows the heart of the weaklings, he can enter with sympathy into their doubts and their distresses, for he has felt the same. I say therefore, this morning, in the name of the Lord Jesus, to all of you who love Him, "Look well to the weak ones of the church."

But I cannot think, as some expositors do, that weakness is the main idea in the word "lambs," for the notion of a lamb is not confined to the thought of weakness, since full-grown sheep may be weak and lambs may be vigorous, but the most prominent thought is that of youth. The lambs are the young of the flock. So, then, we ought to look specially and carefully

after those who are *young in grace*. They may be old in years, and yet they may be mere babes in grace as to the length of their spiritual life, and therefore they need to be under a good shepherd.

As soon as a person is converted and added to the church he should become the object of the care and kindness of his fellow members. He has but newly come among us, and has no familiar friends among the saints, therefore let us all be friendly to him. Even should we leave our older comrades we must be doubly kind towards those who are newly escaped from the world and have come to find a refuge with the Almighty and His people. Watch with ceaseless care over those newborn babes who are strong in desires, but strong in nothing else. They have but just crept out of darkness, and their eyes can scarcely bear the light, let us be a shade to them until they grow accustomed to the blaze of Gospel day. Addict yourselves to the holy work of caring for the feeble and despondent.

Peter himself that morning must have felt like a newly enlisted soldier, for he had in a sense ended his public Christian life by denying his Lord, and he had begun it again when he “went out and wept bitterly.” He was now making a new confession of his faith before his Lord and his brethren, and therefore, because he was thus made to sympathize with recruits he is commissioned to act as a guardian to them. Young converts are too timid to ask for our help, and so our Lord introduces them to us, and with an emphatic word of command He says, “Feed My lambs.” This shall be our reward, “Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these you have done it unto me.”

But surely we must include in this those who have been converted while *young in years*. We thank God exceedingly that we have among us and round about us many dear children that already know Christ. We have never as a church thought that a

certain number of years must have passed over a child before it can confess its faith in Christ and be received into the church. It is sometimes said that we teach *adult* baptism. We do nothing of the sort. We practice *believer's* baptism, and baptize all who confess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, whether they are children or adults.

Our inquiry as to fitness does not refer to age, but to faith. The number or the fewness of days or years is no consideration whatever with us. Our question is, "Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?" If that be fairly answered we say at once, "What does hinder you to be baptized?" However young a believer may be he should make an open confession of his faith, and be folded with the rest of the flock of Christ.

We are not among those who are suspicious of youthful piety, we could never see more reason for such suspicions in the case of the young than in the cases of those who repent late in life. Of the two we think the latter are more to be questioned than the former, for a selfish fear of punishment and dread of death are more likely to produce a counterfeit faith than mere childishness would be. How much has the child missed which might have spoiled it! How much it does not know which, please God, we hope it never may know! Oh, how much there is of brightness and trustfulness about children when converted to God which is not seen in elder converts!

Our Lord Jesus evidently felt deep sympathy with children, and he is but little like Christ who looks upon them as a trouble in the world, and treats them as if they must needs be either little deceivers or foolish simpletons. To you who teach in our schools are given this joyous privilege of finding out where these young disciples are who are truly the lambs of Christ's flock, and to you He says, "Feed my lambs," that is, instruct such as are truly gracious but young in years.

It is very remarkable that the word used here for “feed my lambs” is very different from the word employed in the precept, “feed my sheep.” I will not trouble you with Greek words, but the second “feed” means exercise the office of a shepherd, rule, regulate, lead, manage them, do all that a shepherd has to do towards a flock, but this first “feed” does not include all that, it means distinctly *feed*, and it directs teachers to a duty which they may, perhaps, neglect, namely, that of instructing children in the faith. The lambs do not so much need keeping in order as we do who know so much, and yet know so little, who think we are so far advanced that we judge one another and contend and emulate.

Christian children mainly need to be taught the doctrine, precept, and life of the Gospel, they require having divine truth put before them clearly and forcibly. Why should the higher doctrines, the doctrines of grace, be kept back from them? They are not, as some say, bones, or if they be bones, they are full of marrow, and covered with fatness. If there be any doctrine too difficult for a child, it is rather the fault of the teacher's conception of it than of the child's power to receive it, provided that child be really converted to God.

It is ours to make doctrine simple, this is to be a main part of our work. Teach the little ones the whole truth and nothing but the truth, for instruction is the great want of the child's nature. A child has not only to live as you and I have, but also to grow, hence he has double need of food. When fathers say of their boys, “What appetites they have!” they should remember that we also should have great appetites if we had not only to keep the machinery going, but to enlarge it at the same time. Children in grace have to grow, rising to greater capacity in knowing, being, doing, and feeling, and to greater power from God, therefore above all things they must be fed.

They must be well fed or instructed, because they are in danger of having their cravings perversely satisfied with error.

Youth is susceptible to evil doctrine. Whether *we* teach young Christians truth or not, the devil will be sure to teach them error. They will hear of it somehow, even if they are watched by the most careful guardians. The only way to keep chaff out of the child's little measure is to fill it brimful with good wheat. Oh that the Spirit of God may help us to do this! The more the young are taught the better, it will keep them from being misled.

We are specially exhorted to feed them because they are so likely to be overlooked. I am afraid our sermons often go over the heads of the younger folk, who, nevertheless, may be as true Christians as the older ones. Blessed is he that can so speak as to be understood of a child! Blessed is that godly woman who in her class so adapts herself to girlish modes of thought that the truth from her heart streams into the children's hearts without let or hindrance.

We ought especially to feed the young because this work is so profitable. Do what we may with persons converted late in life, we can never make much of them. We are very glad of them for their own sakes, but at seventy what remains even if they live another ten years? Train up a child, and he may have fifty years of holy service before him. We are glad to welcome those who come into the vineyard at the eleventh hour, but they have hardly taken their pruning-hook and their spade before the sun goes down, and their short day's work is ended.

The time spent in training the late convert is greater than the space reserved for his actual service, but you take a child-convert and teach him well, and as early piety often becomes eminent piety, and that eminent piety may have a stretch of years before it in which God may be glorified and others may be blessed, such work is profitable in a high degree. It is also

most beneficial work to ourselves. It exercises our humility and helps to keep us lowly and meek. It also trains our patience, let those who doubt this try it, for even young Christians exercise the patience of those who believe in them and are therefore anxious that they should justify their confidence. If you want big-souled, large-hearted men or women, look for them among those who are much engaged among the young, bearing with their follies, and sympathizing with their weaknesses for Jesus' sake.

You see the sphere which is presented to your zealous activity. Will you not occupy it? Many of you are already engaged in it, see to it that you fulfill your high calling, and to the utmost feed the lambs.

II. Secondly, let us speak of **THE MAN** who is to do this.

I look upon my text as addressed, not to Peter only, but to those who are like Peter. What if I say it is addressed to us all? As servants and lovers of Jesus, He says to us, "Feed my lambs." Who should do it? Christ selected Simon Peter as *a leading man*. He was one of the chief of the apostles, if we may use such a word. He was one of the triumvirate that led the van—Peter, and James, and John. But though a leading man, he was to feed the lambs, for no man may think himself too great to care for the young. The best of the church are none too good for this work. And dear friends, do not think because you have other service to do that therefore you should take no interest in this form of holy work, but kindly, according to your opportunities, stand ready to help the little ones, and to cheer those whose chief calling it is to attend to them. To us all this message comes, "Feed my lambs." To the minister, and to all who have any knowledge of the things of God, the commission is given. See to it that you look after the children that are in Christ Jesus. Peter was a leader among believers, yet he must feed the lambs.

But he was especially *a warm-hearted man*. Simon Peter was not a Welshman, but he had a great deal of what we know as Welsh fire in him. He was just the sort of man to interest the young. Children delight to gather round a fire, whether it is on the hearth or in the heart. Certain persons appear to be made of ice, and from these children speedily shrink away, congregations or classes grow smaller every Sunday when cold-blooded creatures preside over them. But when a man or a woman has a kindly heart, the children seem to gather readily, just as flies in these autumn days swarm on a warm sunny wall. Therefore Jesus says to warm-hearted Simon, "Feed my lambs." He is the man for the office.

Simon Peter was, moreover, *an experienced man*. He had known his own weaknesses, he had felt the pangs of conscience, he had sinned much and had been much forgiven, and now he was brought in tender humility to confess the love and loveliness of Jesus. We want experienced men and women to talk to converted children, and to tell them what the Lord has done for them, and what have been their dangers, their sins, their sorrows, and their comforts. The young are glad to hear the story of those who have been further on the road than they have. I may say of experienced saints—their lips keep knowledge. Experience lovingly narrated is suitable food for young believers, instruction such as the Lord is likely to bless to their nourishing in grace.

Simon Peter was now *a greatly indebted man*. He owed much to Jesus Christ, according to that rule of the kingdom—he loves much to whom much has been forgiven. Oh, you that have never entered upon this service for Christ, and yet might do it well, I beseech you consider your obligation to Jesus. The state of our schools at the present moment is a strong argument for your aid. We have plenty of children and few teachers,

around this place of worship many schools are doing their work in a lame and halting manner for want of teachers.

O you who owe so much to Christ, will you not feed His lambs? Ought you not to be forward to offer yourselves? Will you refuse Him? Come forward at once and say, “I have left this work to younger hands, but I will do so no longer. I have experience, and I trust I yet retain a warm heart within my bosom, I will go and join these workers, who are steadily feeding the lambs in the name of the Lord.” So far as to the man who is called to feed the lambs.

III. Thirdly, when the Lord calls a man to a work, He gives him **THE PREPARATION** necessary for it.

How was Peter prepared for feeding Christ's lambs? First, *by being fed himself*. The Lord gave him a breakfast before giving him a commission. You cannot feed lambs or sheep either unless you are fed yourself. It is quite right for you to be teaching a great part of the Lord's-day, but I think a teacher is very unwise who does not come to hear the Gospel preached and get a meal for his own soul. First be fed, and then feed.

But especially Peter was prepared for feeding the lambs by *being with his Master*. He would never forget that morning, and all the incidents of it. It was Christ's voice that he heard, it was Christ's look that pierced him to the heart, he breathed the air which surrounded the risen Lord, and this fellowship with Jesus perfumed Peter's heart and tuned Peter's speech that he might afterwards go forth and feed the lambs. I commend to you the study of instructive books, but above all I commend the study of Christ. Let Him be your library. Get near to Jesus. An hour's communion with Jesus is the best preparation for teaching either the young or the old.

Peter was also prepared in a more painful way than that, namely, *by self-examination*. The question came to him thrice over, “Simon, son of Jonas, love you me? Love you me? Love you

me?" Often the vessel wants scouring with self-examination before the Lord can fitly use it to convey the living water to thirsting ones. It never hurts a true-hearted man to search his own spirit and to be searched and tried by his Lord. It is the hypocrite who is afraid of the truth which tests his profession, he dreads trying discourses, and trying meditations he dreads, but the genuine man wants to know for certain that he really does love Christ, and therefore he looks within him and questions and cross-questions himself.

Mainly, dear friends, that examination should be exercised *concerning our love*, for the best preparation for teaching Christ's lambs is love—love to Jesus and to them. We cannot be priests on their behalf unless like Aaron we wear their names upon our breasts. We must love or we cannot bless. Teaching is poor work when love is gone, it is like a blacksmith working without fire, or a builder without mortar. A shepherd that does not love his sheep is a hireling and not a shepherd, he will flee in the time of danger, and leave his flock to the wolf. Where there is no love there will be no life, living lambs are not to be fed by dead men.

See, brothers and sisters, we preach and teach love, our subject is the love of God in Christ Jesus. How can we teach this if we have no love ourselves? Our objective is to create love in the hearts of those we teach, and to foster it where it already exists, but how can we convey the fire if it is not kindled in our own hearts? How can he promote the flame whose hands are damp, and dripping with worldliness and indifference, so that he acts on the child's heart rather as a bucket of water than as a flame of fire? These lambs of the flock live in the love of Christ, shall they not live in ours? He calls them His lambs and so they are, shall we not love them for His sake?

They were chosen in love, they were redeemed in love, they have been called in love, they have been washed in love, they

have been fed by love, and they will be kept by love till they come to the green pastures on the hilltops of heaven. You and I will be out of gear with the vast machinery of divine love unless our souls are full of affectionate zeal for the good of the beloved ones. Love is the grandest preparation for the ministry, whether exercised in the congregation or in the class. Love, and then feed. If you love, feed. If you do not love, then wait till the Lord has quickened you, and lay not your unhallowed hand to this sacred service.

Thus I have described the sphere, the man, and his preparation.

IV. Let us now consider **THE WORK**, “Feed my lambs.”

I have given you the gist of this subject already. With the weak of the flock, with the new converts in the flock, with the young children in the flock, our principal business is to feed. Every sermon, every lesson, should be a feeding sermon and a feeding lesson. It is of little use to stand and thump the Bible and call out, “Believe, believe, believe!” when nobody knows what is to be believed. I see no use in fiddles and tambourines, neither lambs nor sheep can be fed upon brass bands.

There must be doctrine, solid, sound, Gospel doctrine to constitute real feeding. When you have a joint on the table, then ring the dinner bell, but the bell feeds nobody if no food is served up. Getting children to meet in the morning and the afternoon is a waste of their steps and yours if you do not set before them soul-saving, soul-sustaining truth. Feed the lambs, you need not pipe to them, nor put garlands round their necks, but do feed them.

This feeding is *humble, lowly, unostentatious work*. Do you know the name of a shepherd? I have known the names of one or two who follow that calling, but I never heard anybody speak of them as great men, their names are not in the papers, nor do we hear of them as a trade with a grievance, claiming to be

noticed by the legislature. Shepherds are generally quiet, unobtrusive people. When you look at the shepherd, you would not see any difference between him and the plowman, or the carter.

He plods on uncomplainingly through the winter, and in the early spring he has no rest night or day because the lambs need him, this he does year after year, and yet he will never be made a Knight of the Garter, nor even be exalted to the peerage, albeit he may have done far more useful work than those who are floated into rank upon their own beer barrels. So it is in the case of many a faithful teacher of young children, you hear but little about him, yet he is doing grand work for which future ages will call him blessed. His Master knows all about him, and we shall hear of him in that day, perhaps not till then.

Feeding the lambs is *careful work* too, for lambs cannot be fed on anything you please, especially Christ's lambs. You can soon half poison young believers with bad teaching. Christ's lambs are all too apt to eat herbs which are deleterious, it is needs that we be cautious where we lead them. If men are to take heed what they hear, how much more should we take heed what we teach? It is careful work, the feeding of each lamb separately, and the teaching of each child by itself the truth which it is best able to receive.

Moreover, this is *continuous work*. "Feed my lambs," is not for a season, but for all time. Lambs could not live if the shepherd only fed them once a week. I reckon they would die between Sunday and Sunday, therefore good teachers of the young look after them all the days of the week as they have opportunity, and they are careful about their souls with prayer and holy example when they are not teaching them by word of mouth. The shepherdry of lambs is daily, hourly work. When is a shepherd's work over? How many hours a day does he labor? He will tell you that in lambing-time he is never done.

He sleeps between whiles just when he can, taking much less than forty winks, and then rousing himself for action. It is so with those who feed Christ's lambs, they rest not till God saves and sanctifies their dear ones.

It is *laborious work* too, at least he who does not labor at it will have a terrible account to render. Do you think a minister's life is an easy one? I tell you that he who makes it so will find it hard enough when he comes to die. Nothing so exhausts a man who is called to it as the care of souls, and so it is in measure with all who teach—they cannot do good without spending themselves. You must study the lesson, you must bring forth something fresh to your class, you must instruct and impress. I have no doubt you are often driven very hard for matter, and wonder how you will get through the next Lord's-day. I know you are sore pressed at times if you are worth your salt. You dare not rush to your class unprepared, to offer to the Lord that which costs you nothing. There must be labor if the food is to be wisely placed before the lambs, so that they can receive it.

And all this has to be *done in a singularly choice spirit*, the true shepherd spirit is an amalgam of many precious graces. He is hot with zeal, but he is not fiery with passion; he is gentle, and yet he rules his class; he is loving, but he does not wink at sin; he has power over the lambs, but he is not domineering or sharp; he has cheerfulness, but not levity; freedom, but not license; solemnity, but not gloom. He who cares for lambs should be a lamb himself, and blessed be God, there is a Lamb before the throne who cares for all of us, and does so the more effectually because He is in all things made like unto us.

The Shepherd spirit is a rare and priceless gift. A successful pastor or a successful teacher in a school will be found to have special characteristics, which distinguish him from his fellows. A bird when it is sitting on its eggs, or when the little ones are

newly-hatched, has about it a mother-spirit, so that it devotes all its life to the feeding of its little ones, other birds may be taking their pleasure on the wing, but this bird sits still the life-long day and night, or else its only flights are to provide for gaping mouths which seem to be never filled.

A passion has taken possession of the bird, and something like it comes over the true soul-winner, he would gladly die to win souls, he pines, he pleads, and he plods to bless those on whom his heart is set. If these could but be saved he would pawn half his heaven for it, ay, and sometimes in moments of enthusiasm he is ready to barter heaven altogether to win souls, and like Paul, he could wish himself accursed, so that they were but saved. This blessed extravagance many cannot understand, because they never felt it. May the Holy Ghost work it in us, so we shall act as true shepherds towards the lambs. This, then, is the work, "Feed my lambs."

V. Lastly, let us consider **THE MOTIVE**.

Our Lord Jesus heard Peter's assurance of love, and then He said, "Feed my lambs." The motive for feeding the lambs was to be *his Master's self*, and not his own self. Had Peter been the first Pope of Rome, and had he been like his successors, which indeed he never was, surely it would have been fitting for the Lord to have said to Him, "Feed *your* sheep. I commit them to you, O Peter, Vicar of Christ on earth." No, no, no. Peter is to feed them, but they are not his, they are still Christ's.

The work that you have to do for Jesus, brethren and sisters, is in no sense for yourselves. Your classes are not your children, but Christ's. This is not my church, but Christ's. The exhortation which Paul gave was, "Feed the church of God," and Peter himself wrote in his epistle, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind." Let these lambs turn out what they may, the glory is to

be to the Master and not to the servant, and the whole time spent, and labor given, and energy put forth, is every particle of it to redound to His praise whose these lambs are.

Yet while this is a self-denying occupation, it is sweetly honorable, too, and we may attend to it feeling that it is one of the noblest forms of service. Jesus says, “*My* lambs: *my* sheep.” Think of them, and wonder that Jesus should commit them to us. Poor Peter! Surely when that breakfast began he felt awkward. I put myself into his place, and I know I should hardly have liked to look across the table at Jesus, as I remembered that I denied Him with oaths and curses.

Our Lord desired to set Peter quite at his ease by leading him to speak upon his love which had been so seriously placed in question. Like a good doctor He puts in the lancet where the anxiety was festering, he inquires, “Love you me?” It was not because Jesus did not know Peter’s love, but in order that Peter might know of a surety, and make a new confession, saying, “Yea, Lord; you know that I love you.” The Lord is about to hold a tender controversy with the erring one for a few minutes, that there might never be a controversy between Him and Peter any more.

When Peter said, “Yea, Lord; you know that I love you,” you half thought that the Lord would answer, “Ah, Peter, and I love you,” but He did not say so, and yet He did say so. Perhaps Peter did not see His meaning, but we can see it, for our minds are not confused as Peter’s was on that memorable morning. Jesus did in effect say, “I love you so that I trust you with that which I purchased with My heart’s blood. The dearest thing I have in all the world is My flock, see, Simon, I have such confidence in you, I so wholly rely on your integrity as being a sincere lover of Me, that I make you a shepherd to My sheep. These are all I have on earth, I gave everything for them, even

My life, and now, Simon, son of Jonas, take care of them for Me." Oh, it was "kindly spoken."

It was the great heart of Christ saying, "Poor Peter, come right in and share My dearest cares." Jesus so believed Peter's declaration that He did not tell him so in words, but in deeds. Three times He said it, "Feed my lambs: feed my sheep: feed my sheep," to show how much He loved him. When the Lord Jesus loves a man very much, He gives him much to do or much to suffer. Many of us have been plucked like brands from the burning, for we were "enemies to God by wicked works," and now we are in the church among His friends, and our Savior trusts us with His dearest ones.

I wonder when the prodigal son came back and the father received him, whether when market-day came he sent his younger son to market to sell the wheat and bring home the money. Most of you would have said, "I am glad the boy is back, at the same time I shall send his elder brother to do the business, for he has always stuck by me." As for myself, the Lord Jesus took me in as a poor prodigal son, and it was not many weeks before He put me in trust with the Gospel, that greatest of all treasures, this was a grand token of love. I know of none to excel it.

The commission given to Peter proved how thoroughly the breach was healed, how fully the sin was forgiven, for Jesus took the man who had cursed and sworn in denial of Him and bade him feed His lambs and sheep. Oh, blessed work, not for yourselves, and yet for yourselves! He that serves himself shall lose himself, but he that loses himself does really serve himself after the best possible fashion.

The master motive of a good shepherd is love. We are to feed Christ's lambs *out of love*.

First, as a proof of love, "If you love me, keep my commandments." If you love me, feed my lambs. If you love

Christ, show it, and show it by doing good to others, by laying yourself out to help others that Jesus may have joy of them.

Next, as an inflowing of love, “Feed my lambs,” for if you love Christ a little when you begin to do good, you will soon love Him more. Love grows by active exercise. It is like the blacksmith’s arm, which increases in strength by wielding the hammer. Love loves till it loves more, and it loves more till it loves more, and it still loves more till it loves most of all, and then it is not satisfied, but aspires after enlargement of heart that it may copy yet more fully the perfect model of love in Christ Jesus, the Savior.

Besides being an inflowing of love, the feeding of lambs is an outflow of love. How often we have told our Lord that we loved Him when we were preaching, and I do not doubt you teachers feel more of the pleasure of love to Jesus when you are busy with your classes than when you are by yourselves at home. A person may go home and sit down and groan out —

“’Tis a point I long to know
Oft it causes anxious thought,”

and wipe his forehead and rub his eyes, and get into the dumps without end, but if he will rise up and work for Jesus, the point he longs to know will soon be settled, for love will come pouring out of his heart till he can no longer question whether it is there.

So let us abide in this blessed service for Christ that it may be the delight of love, the very ocean in which love shall swim, the sunlight in which it shall bask. The recreation of a loving soul is work for Jesus Christ, and among the highest and most delicious forms of this heavenly recreation is the feeding of young Christians, endeavoring to build them up in knowledge and understanding, that they may become strong in the Lord.

The Lord bless you, dear fellow-laborers in the Sabbath school,
from this time forth and for evermore.

1685 GOD'S NON-REMEMBRANCE OF SIN – JER. 31:34

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, October 22, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins.” — Isaiah 43:25

“For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” — Jeremiah 31:34

“For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” — Heb. 8:12

“And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.” — Hebrews 10:17

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Jeremiah 31:15-37]

YOU WILL THESE TEXTS are all alike in their declaration that the Lord will not remember His people's sins. I have taken four of them to make the basis of my sermon firm as adamant. It is written, “In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.” Here then, you have Isaiah and Jeremiah, two Old Testament saints, affirming the same thing; is this not enough? Added to these you have the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who, in all probability, was Paul, and these three agree in one. Their united testimony is that Jehovah,

the Lord God, will forgive the sins of His people, and do it in so complete a way that He will remember their iniquities no more. Now, if I did not preach at all, but merely gave you these four texts to consider, I think the service ought to be full of comfort to all who know their guiltiness and are anxious to obtain mercy. That article in the creed is too little thought of—*"I believe in the forgiveness of sin."* Men flippantly declare that they believe it when they are not conscious of any great sin of their own. But when his transgression is made apparent to a man, and his iniquity comes home to him, it is quite another matter. Does any unregenerate person believe in the forgiveness of sin? I think not. No man in sincerity believes it until God the Holy Spirit has taught him its truth, and has written it upon his heart. No revealed truth is more generally doubted and disbelieved than this, the plainest of all revelations, that, the Lord is gracious and full of compassion, and ready to pass by the iniquities of His people. Men disbelieve for themselves, and doubt it as to others when the matter is fairly tested.

When a man's sins are set before him in the light of God's countenance, his first instinct is to fear that they are altogether unpardonable. If he does not state his unbelief in so many words, yet in the secret of his soul that dreadful conviction takes hold upon him and darkens every window of hope. He looks to the law of God, and while he looks in that direction he will certainly conclude that there is no pardon, for the law knows nothing of forgiveness. It is, "Do this and you shall live. Disobey and you shall die." To convince and to condemn is all the law was sent for. By the law is the knowledge of sin and by its power, sinners are shut up in the prison house of despair, from which only the Lord Jesus can deliver us. What the law asserts the understanding also supports, for within the awakened man there is the memory of his past offenses, and on account of these his conscience passes judgment upon his

soul, and condemns it even as the law does. “God must punish wickedness,” is the utterance of conscience. “He is not the judge of all the earth if He did not do right and if He does right, He must visit my transgressions with the threatened penalty.” Thus, the thunder of Sinai is echoed by conscience.

Meanwhile, many natural impressions and instincts assist and increase the clamors of conscience, for the man knows within himself, as the result of observation and experience, that sin must bring its own punishment. He perceives that is a knife which cuts the hand of him that handles it, a sword that kills the man who fights with it. He feels that he cannot himself readily pass by offenses committed by his fellow men, and so he concludes that the Lord cannot willingly forgive. That part of the hardness of his heart goes to deepen the conviction that God will not pass by his transgression, and he is therefore terribly dismayed and hopeless of mercy. Meanwhile the devil comes in with all the horrors of the infernal pit, and threatens speedy destruction. That same evil spirit who once pictured sin in glowing colors, and set before the sinner the pleasureableness of unrighteousness, now comes in and turns accuser, forestalls the final sentence, and hardens the man's heart by the assurance that there is no hope. Bunyan very aptly pictures Diabolus when he was attacking the town of Mansoul, as making Captain Past-Hope unfurl the red colors which were carried by Mr. Despair, and he also speaks of the roaring of the tyrant's drum, which sounded forth terribly, especially by night, so that the men of Mansoul had always in their ears, the sound of “Hell-fire, Hell-fire!” and all this to keep them from submitting to their gracious prince. Thus, for once, the devil craftily cooperates with the law of God and with conscience, these would drive men to self-despair, but Satan would go further, and compel them to despair as touching the Lord Himself, so as to believe that pardon for transgression is quite

impossible. The convinced sinner is able to believe that mercy may be shown to others, but as for himself, he signs his own death warrant, and labors under the full persuasion that the acts of God's mercy can never extend *to him*. No stocks can hold a man as fast as his own guilty fears. The hangman's whip never tortured men as cruelly as does an awakened conscience.

With the desponding I shall try to deal at this time, and may the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, help me to console them.

I. Our first theme is this — **THERE IS FORGIVENESS.** Our four texts all teach us that doctrine with great distinctness. Is not that a sublime assurance, "I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins"? Does not Paul put it sweetly as from God's own mouth, "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more"? Remember how the Psalmist, in the one hundred and thirtieth psalm makes this a special note of thanksgiving, "There is forgiveness with You that You may be feared." Let us adore the Lord because He delights in mercy.

For a minute or two let me try to prove—may it be to your satisfaction, O you despairing ones—that there is forgiveness.

This appears, first, in *the treatment of sinners by God*, inasmuch as He spares their forfeited lives. When our first parents had transgressed they came at once under desert of penalty. The Lord visited the garden and convinced the offenders of their transgression, but instead of then and there pronouncing their doom, and casting them forever away from His presence, He talked to them of a certain seed of the woman that should bruise the serpent's head. The curse which must fall fell obliquely, descending first upon the soil, and secondarily upon the man; first upon the serpent, and more gently on the woman, whose very pain and travail were to bring forth deliverance for the race and vengeance on the enemy. The man and the woman each had a separate sentence in labor and in childbirth, but oh,

how mild were these sentences compared with what they might have been. How joyful is the fact that over all, there was the sparing hand of God letting them live, and His cheering voice promising them ultimate deliverance.

Would the Lord thus have spared them if He had not meant to show mercy? Would He not have crushed a sinful race even in its egg, and have blotted out forever those of whom not long after it repented Him that He had made them upon the earth? Assuredly the Lord meant pardon when He tarried to inquire, “Adam, where are you?” In the morning of human history the Lord’s long-suffering displayed itself and gave promise of larger grace. The same is true of you and of me. If God had no pardons would He not long ago have cut us down as cumberers of the ground? We sinned early in life, perhaps we sinned grossly in our youthful days, doing evil with great wantonness and willfulness, according to the obstinacy of our hearts. Why did He not then say, “I will take these away, they will only go from bad to worse, and they will infect others with their vices. Therefore will I root them out lest they become injurious to those about them and a curse to future generations”? But no, even yonder blasphemer was not smitten to death when he imprecated damnation upon himself. Yon Sabbath-breaker was not cut down when he made the Lord’s holy day to be an opportunity for wickedness. He that lied was not made a dreadful example of judgment like Ananias and Sapphira. He that stood out to oppose God was not swallowed up quickly like Korah, Dathan and Abiram. No, all these have been spared, spared to this day, and to what end, do you think? Surely, the long-suffering of God is repentance, and repentance is mercy. God waits long because He wills not the death of any but that they turn to Him and live.

In the second place, why did God institute *the ceremonial law* if there were no ways of pardoning transgression? Why the

bullocks and the lambs offered in sacrifice? Why the shedding of blood if God did not intend to blot out sin? Why the burnt offerings in which God accepted man's gift, if man could not be accepted? Assuredly He could not be accepted if regarded as guilty. Why the peace offering in which God feasted with the offerer and the two united in feeding upon the one sacrifice? How could this be unless God intended to forgive and enter into fellowship with men? I confess I cannot understand the institution of the priesthood and sacrifice unless mercy was intended thereby. Again, why was there a tabernacle for God to dwell with His people if He would not forgive their iniquities? How could He dwell with unforgiven men? Why was there a mercy seat? Why was there a high priest ordained from among men who should enter into the holy place, and make a typical atonement? Does not a type imply the existence of that which is typified? Why the scapegoat to take away sin in symbol, if sin cannot be taken away in reality? Why the burning of the offering outside the gate in order that sin might be put away from God's people, if it could not be put away? Certainly, the evident design of the whole Mosaic economy was to reveal to man the existence of mercy in the heart of God, and the effectual operation of that mercy in washing away sin.

Further than this, dear friends, if there were no forgiveness of sin why has the Lord given to sinful men *exhortations to repent*? Why does the Lord say, "Turn you to your God: keep mercy and judgment and wait upon the God continually"? Why does He say to men, "O Israel, return unto the Lord your God; for you have fallen by your iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips"? Why does He cry, "Therefore also now, says the Lord, turn you even to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments,

and turn unto the Lord your God”? Is it not because it can be added, “for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repents Him of the evil”? Is it not true, even as Elihu said, “He looks upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light”? If sin could not be pardoned why under the gospel are we bid to urge men to repent of sin, to confess their sins, and to forsake them? Might not the Lord have said, “Let them alone: it is of no use their repenting: no mercy is in reserve for them, therefore let them continue in their iniquity till their own ways destroy them”? Even John the Baptist’s cry of “Repent, Repent!” is a note of hope to transgressors. The times of their ignorance God has winked at, but now under gospel rule, He commands all men everywhere to repent, because repentance has the promise of the blotting out of sin.

If you will think of it you will see that there must be pardon in the hands of God, or why *the institution of religious worship* among us to this day? Why are we allowed to pray in secret if we cannot be forgiven? What is the value of prayer at all if that first and most vital favor of forgiven sin is utterly beyond our reach? Why are we allowed to sing the praises of God? Why has the Holy Spirit given us the Book of Psalms? Why are we bidden to use psalms and hymns and spiritual songs? God cannot accept the praises of unforgiven men; worshippers must be clean before they draw near to His altar with their incense. If, then, I am taught to sing and give thanks to God, it must be because “His mercy endures forever.” Does God expect the condemned to praise Him? Will He shut us up in the prison for certain death and yet expect us to chant hallelujahs to His praise? It cannot be so. The very ordaining of prayer and praise indicates a design of mercy to the sons of men.

Why dear friends, are there two special ordinances of God's house if in that house there is no remission of sin? Why the baptism of believers? It signifies our death in Christ to sin, but how so if we cannot be dead to sin? It signifies typically the washing away of sin. But to what end, and to what use, except of delusion, if there is no washing away of sin by God's abounding grace? What does the Lord's Supper mean that eating of bread with God and drinking of the cup in familiar fellowship with Him? Why that showing forth the death of Christ until He comes, if in that death there is no virtue, and if God cannot deal with men on terms of love? Surely the ordinances of the Lord's house are full of invitation to such as bemoan their transgressions and are willing to come to Jesus for pardon and renewal. The very existence of a church, of a gospel ministry, and the toleration of divine worship are promises and prophecies of the forgiveness of sins.

What assurance of pardon lies in the ordaining, sealing, and ratifying of *the covenant of grace*? The first covenant left us under condemnation, but one main design of the new covenant is to bring us into justification. Why a new covenant at all if our unrighteousness can never be removed? Is not this the tenor of the covenant as stated in our second text? Let the Holy Spirit Himself be a witness unto us as we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord, I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." What do you say to this, O despairing one? Will you dream that God can lie and even make a covenant merely to mock poor sinners with a groundless hope? Oh, think not so, for there is forgiveness.

Furthermore, my brethren, why did Christ institute *the Christian ministry*, and send forth His servants *to proclaim His gospel*? For what is the gospel but a declaration that Christ is

exalted on high to give repentance unto Israel and remission of sins? Is not its great promise this—that God will put away our transgressions upon our believing in Jesus Christ, our Great Sacrifice? “I believe in the forgiveness of sins,” for if it were not so then has the cross become nullity, and the death of the Only-begotten a hideous mistake. To what end those bleeding wounds? To what end that thorn-crowned head? To what end that cry, *“Eloi, Eloi, lama Sabachthani”*? To what end is that shout of “It is finished”? The cross is the grandest of realities, and the core of its meaning is the removal of sin by Him who bore our sins in His own body on the tree. Assuredly there is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, heavy-laden soul, that fountain is opened for you. Now, once in the history of the world has the Son of God appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, poor guilty one, if you believe, your guilt was put away by His atoning death.

Why are we so earnestly commanded to preach this gospel to every creature, if the creature hearing it and believing it, must, nevertheless, still lie under his sin? Our Lord Jesus has commanded that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, why is this, if there is no remission of sins? The genuine love of God is manifested in His desire that to the utmost ends of the earth it should be proclaimed that, “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” “All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men.”—

“Waft, waft you winds, the story,
And you, you waters, roll,
Till like a sea of glory
It spreads from pole to pole!”

There is forgiveness. Through the name of Jesus whoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sins. "Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." "He that believes in Him is justified from all things from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses." Paul says, "God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you," and it is even so.

Now, you do not need any more arguments, but if you did I would venture to offer this. Why are we *taught in that blessed model of prayer* which our Savior has left us, to say, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," or, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us"? It is evident that God means us to give a real, true, and hearty absolution to all who have offended us. He does not intend that we should play at forgiveness, but should really and from our hearts most freely and sincerely forgive all those who have done evil towards us in any way. Yes, but then He has linked with that forgiveness our prayer for mercy, teaching us to ask that He would forgive us as we forgive them. If, then, our forgiveness is real, so is His; if ours is sincere, so is His; if ours is complete, so is His; only much more so, inasmuch as the great God of all is so much more gracious than we poor, fallen creatures ever can be. A star of hope shines upon the sinner in the Lord's Prayer in that particular petition, for it seems to say, "There is a real, true and hearty forgiveness of God toward you, even as there is in your heart a real, true and hearty forgiveness of those who offend you." Mind you do really and heartily forgive others, for your own pardon is to be measured thereby. See well to this.

The best of all arguments is this; *God has actually forgiven multitudes of sinners*. We have read in Holy Scripture of men who walked with God and had this testimony, that they pleased God. But they could not have pleased God if their sins still provoked Him to wrath, therefore He must have put their sins away.

Those saints of the Old Testament who were evidently divinely favored, with whom God held sweet communion, to whom He gave marvelous power in prayer, in whom He showed the majesty of faith—all those must have been forgiven men, for the Lord could not have walked with them, dwelt in them, worked by them, and displayed His glory in them, if He had not forgiven them. But I need not talk of past ages. There are many sitting among you this day who if you will ask them will tell you that they enjoy a clear sense of forgiven sin. They remember well that happy day when Jesus washed their sins away. And their state of peace, of joyful privilege, and of expectant hope, is to them intensely delightful, and may be to you an evident testimony that remission of sin is a real experience, and is known among God's people at this day. Sin can still be put away. The spot which seemed indelible can be washed out, till all is white as snow, through the precious blood of Christ. Our texts, all of them declare it, saying with one breath, "I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more."

May God the Holy Spirit make use of these arguments for the comfort of every seeking sinner here and of many more who shall read this discourse.

II. Secondly, THIS FORGIVENESS IS TANTAMOUNT TO FORGETTING SIN. This is a wonder to me, a wonder of wonders, that God should say that He will do what in some sense He cannot do—that He should use speech which includes impossibility, and yet that it should be strictly true as He intends it. God's pardon of sin is so complete that He Himself describes it as not remembering our iniquity and transgression. I have said that there is impossibility in it, and so there is, because the Lord cannot in strict accuracy of speech forget anything, forgetfulness is an infirmity, and God has no infirmities. The Lord does not exercise memory as you and I

do. We recall the past, but He has no past, all things are present with Him. God sees everything at once by an intuitive perception, the past, the present, the future are before Him at a glance. We may not speak, except after the manner of men, of the Lord God as having memory, and yet how blessed it is that He should Himself use the speech which is current among ourselves, and represent Himself after the manner of a man, and then say, "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more forever." He wishes us to know that His pardon is so true and deep that it amounts to an absolute oblivion, a total forgetting of all the wrong-doing of the pardoned ones.

You know what we do when we exercise memory. To speak popularly, a man lays up a thing in his mind, but when sin is forgiven *it is not laid up in God's mind*. A certain matter has happened, and we remember it, storing it away in our memory. We read that, "Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." We make a kind of storeroom of our memory, and there things are preserved, like fruits in autumn, stored up to be used by and by. We reckon a man to be fortunate who has a good memory, so that he can lay by things in his brain where he can get at them in time of need. The Lord will not do this with our sins. He will not store them in His archives. He will not give them house-room. The record of our sin shall not be laid up in the divine treasury. We shall not cry with Job, "My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and You sew up my iniquity." As for the ungodly, their sins are written with an iron pen, and the measure of their iniquity is daily filling, till it is poured out upon their own head. Their sins have gone before them to the judgment seat, and are crying aloud for vengeance. As for God's people, their case is otherwise, the Lord imputes not their iniquities to them, and does not treasure them up against a day of wrath. Of course the Lord remembers their evil doings, in the sense that He cannot forget anything, but judicially as a

judge, He forgets the transgressions of the pardoned ones. They are not before Him in court, and come not under His official perception.

In remembering, men also consider and meditate on things, but *the Lord will not think over* the sins of His people. A grievous wrong is apt to engross our thoughts. It often casts its shadow upon the mind, and you cannot get rid of it. I have known persons to brood over an offense as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings. The wrong grows worse as they think it over. They carefully observe the offense from different points of view, and whereas they were indignant at first, they nurse their wrath and make it so warm, that it turns to fury. At first they would have been satisfied with an apology, but when they have brooded over the injustice, it seems so atrocious that they demand vengeance on the offender. The merciful Lord does not do so to those who repent. No, for He says, "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." The Great Father's heart is not brooding over the injuries we have done. His infinite mind is not revolving within itself the tale of our iniquities. Ah, no. If we have fled to Christ for refuge, the Lord remembers our sin no more. The record of our iniquity is taken away, and the judge has no judicial memory of it.

Sometimes you have almost forgotten a thing, and it is quite gone out of your mind, but an event happens which recalls it so vividly that it seems as if it were perpetrated but yesterday. *God will not recall the sin of the pardoned.* I am blest, thank God, with a splendid memory for forgetting what anybody says or does against me. I forget it, not because I try to do so, but because I cannot help it, and therefore I claim no credit for it. The other day when I was speaking kindly with a person I was reminded by another that this man had done me great injustice years ago. I had no recollection of it, and when it was brought before my mind I was grateful that I had forgotten it, because

I could honestly treat the man as a friend, as indeed he now is. The occurrence was banished from my mind till my memory was refreshed about it. The gracious Lord can never be refreshed in His memory concerning the sins of His people, they are gone past recall. "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." Neither will there be a dark day when all of a sudden the Lord will say, "I have been treating this man graciously, but now I recollect what He did in former years, and I must change My tone. I recollect that oath he swore, that criminal indulgence into which he fell, that drunkenness, that piece of dishonesty, that awful hypocrisy, and though I have been gentle with him, I must, in justice change My course, and punish him." No! No! This will never be the case with our forgiving Lord. "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." "No more!" Let those words go echoing through the chambers of despair, "NO MORE!" Is there not music in the two syllables? God will never have His memory refreshed. The transgressions of His people are dead and buried with Christ, and they shall never have a resurrection. "I will not remember their sins."

Furthermore this not remembering means that God will *never seek any further atonement*, the apostle says, "Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin." The one sacrifice of Jesus has made an end of sin. Under the old law they offered an expiatory sacrifice, but they must necessarily offer it again and again. There was remembrance of sins made every year on the Day of Atonement, but now the blessed One has entered once and for all within the veil, and has put away sin forever by the sacrifice of Himself, so that there remains no more sacrifice for sin. The Lord will never demand another victim, nor seek another expiatory offering. The sufferings of Jesus are so all-sufficient that no believer shall be made to suffer penalty for His unrighteousness.

Look at that fiction of purgatory which is coming back into the English Church, and is hankered after by certain Dissenters. They are beginning to believe in a modified form of purgatory, and this is a dark sign of the times. Purgatory has always paid the Pope well, it is the fattest province of his dominions, and has furnished his treasury plentifully. But how can God's people go to purgatory? For if they go there at all, they go there for sins which God does not remember, and so He cannot give a reason for sending them there. I have no authentic communication by which to describe purgatory, but by Romish report it is a terrible place. Now, if true believers go there, then God either does remember their sins, which He says He will not do, or else He punishes them for sins which He does not remember. Did you ever hear of a judge sending a man to prison for a crime which the judge did not remember? Does God forgive and forget and yet punish? Do not, I pray you, believe, in any shape or form in a middle state in which sin can be atoned for or the condition of a man altered. When you die you shall either go to heaven or to hell and that straight away, and your state in either case will be fixed, and fixed eternally without the possibility of a change. This doctrine is the cornerstone of Protestantism, and if that is taken away there is a vacuum left in which all the evil doctrines of the papacy will speedily find a nest. Stand you to the truth revealed in Scripture, and to that only. The wicked shall go away unto everlasting punishment, and the righteous unto eternal life. If you are forgiven, God will never remember your sins, so that in no shape or way shall you ever have to make atonement for them.

Again, when it is said that God forgets our sins it signifies that *He will never punish us for them*. How can He when He has forgotten them? Next, that *He will never upbraid us with them*—“He gives liberally and upbraids not.” How can He upbraid us with what He has forgotten? He will not even lay them to our

charge. See what Ezekiel says — “All his transgressions that he has committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him.” The apostle bravely demanded, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?” Shall God do it? It is God that justifies,” how then, can He accuse? Shall Christ do it? He is the Judge, but He cannot accuse, for “it is Christ that died, yes, rather that is risen again, who sits at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.” Shall Jesus intercede for us and yet accuse us? Shall sweet waters and bitter waters come out of the same fountain? No, that cannot be. The Lord has forgotten our sins, and therefore He can never lay them to our charge.

Once more, when the Lord says, “I will not remember their sins,” what does it mean but this—that *He will not treat us any the less generously* on account of our having been great sinners. You that have been the chief of sinners, He will not put you in the second class of Christians, and treat you with a sort of second-rate love. He will not even remember that you have sinned, but treat you as if you had been perfectly innocent, and were totally clear from all iniquity. He will not remember your faults. Why, look how the Lord takes some of the biggest sinners and uses them for His glory. Is not this a proof that He has ceased to remember their sins? When I think of Peter standing up on the day of Pentecost, and three thousand being converted under His first sermon, I think no more of Peter’s failure and the cock crowing. I can see that the Lord has forgotten His threefold denial, and placed Him in the front to be a soulwinner. But the Lord Jesus not only uses His people, He honors them greatly. What honors He put upon the apostles, those men that forsook Him and fled in the hour of His passion. He says to each of them, “I will not remember your sins,” for He makes them leaders of His hosts, though they have been a parcel of runaways, and have forsaken their Master in His hour of peril.

See how condescendingly the Lord has taken some here present, and has honored them, and given them to bring blood-bought souls to Himself, in proof that He has wholly forgotten their sins. Then to think, that He should adopt us into His family, we that were His enemies, and rebellious, and children of the devil. Is it not wonderful that He puts us among the children, and even makes us “heirs of God, jointheirs with Jesus Christ”? Surely, when that testament was written by which He made us heirs with Christ; it was clear proof that the Father did not any more remember our iniquities. To put down such blacks in the same testament with His own dear Son, and then to say, “I will receive them graciously and love them freely,” this is surprising grace. Brethren, infinite love has made us to be “accepted in the Beloved,” comely with His comeliness which He has put upon us; precious in His sight and honorable, jewels in His case, and a crown of glory unto Him. Is not this the sign of perfect forgiveness? With His whole heart He watches over us to do us good. Surely, blessing He blesses us, yes, and makes us blessings. We shall have grace on earth, and glory in heaven. He will seat us as objects of His grace in heaven, not in an inferior place in the suburbs or behind the door, but He will cause us to sit with Jesus on His throne, even as He has sat down with the Father on His throne. We shall be with Him where He is and behold His glory, and be forever peers of the heavenly realm. Surely all this proves that He has altogether blotted out our sins, and has determined to treat us as if we had been perfectly innocent. Indeed, the saints are without fault before the throne of God, for they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. The believer's sins no longer exist, and “if they are searched for they shall not be found; yes, they shall not be, says the Lord.” —

“Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
And who has grace so rich and free?”

Oh, that God would comfort His mourners by this sermon! I have a notion in my head that if when I was under the sense of sin I could have heard this subject handled, I should have found liberty at once. Though I had been hidden away in the back seat of the gallery out of sight, if only I had heard of such mercy as this, I should have jumped at it. I cannot tell how it might have been, for I do not remember hearing so plain a declaration of boundless grace. Oh, how I pray and hope that the Lord will lead some poor soul to accept this unspeakable blessing! Come, you consciously guilty ones, and touch the silver scepter of your reigning Savior. He is ready to forgive, the atonement is made and accepted, the Savior who died has risen again, therefore come to Him, and be at peace. Oh, that the blessed Spirit may lead you to feel the power of the reconciling blood!

III. I finish with the blessed fact that **FORGIVENESS IS TO BE HAD**. How is it to be had? Let me speak briefly, and you catch up every word and think over it. Forgiveness is to be had through the atoning blood. Why does God forget our sin? Is it not on this wise—He looks upon His Son *Jesus bearing that sin*. Did you ever think of what God the Father sees in Jesus on the cross? Why you and I have seen enough to make us break our hearts, but when the Father saw His only-begotten Son suffering even to death, it made such an infinite impression upon His great soul that He forgot the sins for which His Son gave His life. That new thing coming in, the most wonderful thing that God has on His heart, the death of the Only-begotten, made a clean erasure in the eternal memory of all the transgressions of those for whom Christ died. In such way He describes to us the mystery of forgiving love. Dear hearts get

under the shadow of the Redeemer's cross. Trust Jesus Christ now, and that blood is then and there applied to you, and your sins shall be remembered no more forever, because He remembers His Son's suffering in your place and stead.

Next, remember that this forgetfulness of God is caused by *overflowing mercy*. God is love, "His mercy endures forever," and He desired vent for His love. His great heart was filled with a desire to display the grace which pervaded His nature. He must be gracious, and He would be gracious, and because of that divine resolve He cast our sins behind His back. Come, then, if you wish to have your sins forgiven! Come and bow before the mercy of God. Plead not merit but mercy. Do not dare to approach the Lord on terms of law, but draw near on terms of grace. Here is a word for you that were said by an eminent saint when approaching his God, "Lord, I am hell, but you are heaven." Here is a full description of yourself, and as blessed a description of God, as may be. Come, then, poor hell-deserving one and hide yourself in the heaven of everlasting love, and it shall be a haven of peace to you forever.

How does God forget sin? Well, it is through His *everlasting love*. He loved His people before they fell, and He loved His people when they fell. "I have loved you," says He, "with an everlasting love," and when that great love of His had led Him to give His Son Jesus for His people's ransom, it made Him also forget His people's sins. The Lord so loved His chosen that He said, "He has not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither has He seen perverseness in Israel." Having shown His love by the gift of Jesus, that love, has covered a multitude of sins. Do you not see then that if you want to enter into this pardon, this forgetfulness of sin, you must come to God on the terms of His free love, and ask Him to forgive you because His name is love? "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving

kindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies blot out my transgressions.”

Again, God forgets His people's sins because of *the contentment He has in them as renewed and sanctified creatures*. When He hears their cries of repentance, when He hears their declarations of faith, when He sees the love which His Spirit has worked in them, when He beholds them growing more and more like His dear Son, He delights in them. His joy is fulfilled in them. He is well-pleased with them, and communes with them lovingly. He observes their signs of grace and accepts them, and remembers their iniquities no more. Oh, then, you must come to God and ask Him to change you, and to renew you, that He may have delight in you. Come and beseech Him that you may be born again and made new creatures in Christ Jesus, for this must be if you are to be forgiven. There cannot be pardon of sin where there is not a renewal of the heart, and that must come from God by His sovereign grace alone.

Oh, you that would have pardon of sin, come for it this morning in God's appointed way. “Repent,” He says, that is, be sorry for your sin. Change your mind about it and hate it, though once you loved it. Then confess it, for He says, “Only acknowledge your iniquity.” Get home and mourn your transgression before your offended Lord, sincerely, fully, and with deep regret, and then He will take away your sin, for it is written he that confesses and forsakes his sin shall find mercy. This is His way, then. Acknowledge that you are guilty but ask that you may be guilty no more.

Chief of all, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved,” and that saving, includes an act of amnesty and oblivion as to all your sinful thoughts, and words, and acts. Trust the Lord Jesus Christ. There is the pith of it. Trust yourself in the hands that were nailed to the cross for you. Trust yourself to the love of the heart which was pierced with a spear,

and forthwith there came out blood and water. Have you done this? Then you are even now forgiven. Your sin has gone; it is cast into the depths of the sea. Go down those aisles with your heart dancing within you for delight, for there is nothing laid against you now since you are a believer in the Lord Jesus. God imputes not iniquity to the man who has cast Himself on the Savior. Go you hence and never forget your sin, or the mercy which has forgiven it. Always repent and always praise the Lord. Honor the forgetfulness of God in not remembering your faults, and from now on tell this blessed news to everyone you see—there is forgiveness, such forgiveness as was never heard of until God Himself revealed it by saying of His people, “Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” God bless you dear friends, from now on and forever. Amen.

1686 ON THE LAKE OF GALILEE – MATT. 8:27

A Sermon
Delivered on Thursday Morning, October 6, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

The men marveled, saying, “What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him!” — Matthew 8:27

And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, “What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” — Mark 4:41

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Matthew 8]

THIS STORY of the tempest upon the lake is wonderfully full of spiritual interest. Not only does it, literally, show to us the divine power of our blessed Master in lulling the tempest, rendered the more conspicuous by being placed side by side with the human weakness which made Him sleep in the ship upon a pillow, but spiritually, it is a kind of ecclesiastical history, a miniature outline of the story of the church in all ages. No, the teaching ends not when you have read the incident in that light, it also contains a suggestive forecast of the story of every man who is making the spiritual voyage in company with Jesus.

Notice, first, how it is a kind of ecclesiastical history. There is Christ in the vessel with His disciples. What is that but a church with its pastor? We see in the church a vessel bearing a rich cargo, steering for a desired haven, and fitted out for

fishing on the road, should fair opportunity occur. Her being upon a sea shows her to be here below, subject to trial, suffering, labor and peril. I scarcely know of any more apt picture of a church than a ship upon the treacherous Galilean sea with Jesus and His disciples sailing in it. After a while a tempest comes, this we may safely reckon upon. Whatever ship makes a fair voyage, with a favoring wind, the ship of the church never will. She has her calms, but these last not forever, her sail is sure to be weather-beaten at one time or another, and the occasions are seldom far apart. The vessel which has Jesus for its captain is destined to feel the tempest. Christ has not come to send peace on earth, but a sword. This is His own declaration, and He knows His own intent. Every sail of the good ship which bears the flag of the Lord High Admiral of our fleet must be beaten with the wind, and every plank in her must be tried by the waves.

To Christ's church there are many storms, and some of them of the most terrible character. Of heresy, ah, how near to wrecking has she been with the false doctrines of Gnosticism, Arianism, Popery and Rationalism! Of persecution she has constant experience, but sometimes exceedingly vehement has the tornado been. In the early stages of church history, the pagan persecutions of Rome followed thick and fast upon each other, and when Giant Pagan had emptied out all his fury a worse tyrant came, whose magical arts raised hurricanes of wind against the good ship. There sat at Rome a harlot who persecuted the saints exceedingly, being drunk with their blood. Then there raged a cyclone which almost drove the boat out of the water, and drenched and well-near drowned her crew, a fierce wind beat upon the royal vessel, so that the waves threatened to swallow her up quick. Tears and blood covered the saints as with a salt and crimson spray. Hers was no pleasure trip; she went forth like the lifeboat, fashioned for the purpose

of riding out the tempest. The true ship of the Lord was, and is, and will be in a storm until the Lord shall come, and then there shall be for it no further wave of trial, but the sea of glass forever.

Note, again, that while this tempest was roaring worse and worse, the Lord was in the ship, but He seemed to be asleep. So has it often been. No providence delivered the persecuted. No marvelous manifestations of the Spirit scattered the heresy. The Christ was in the church, but He was in the back part, with His head upon a pillow, asleep. You all know the portions of church history which this illustrates. Then came distress, the people in the vessel began to be alarmed. They were afraid that they should utterly perish. And do you wonder at it when the peril was so great? That distress led to prayer. Mighty prayer has often been produced by mighty trial. Oh, how slack the church has been in the presentation of her spiritual offering until the Lord has sent fire upon her, and that fire has seemed to kindle her frankincense, so that it has begun to smoke towards heaven. Prayer was produced by distress, and prayer brought distress to an end. Then the Master rose up, and displayed His power and Godhead. You know how He has done so in reformation and revivals time after time. He has chided the unbelief of His trembling saints, and then He has hushed the winds and the waves, and there has been a time of idyllic peace for His poor, weather-beaten church, a period free from bloodshed and heresy, an era of progress and peace. The church has a history which has many a time repeated itself. If you take an interest in the navigation of that wondrous vessel which carries Christ and all His chosen, you will never have to complain of lack of incidents.

But I think I said that the story of the storm upon the lake is an admirable emblem of the spiritual voyage of every man who is bound for the fair havens in company with Jesus. We

are with Christ, happy with Him, and sailing pleasantly, will this last? Right speedily comes a storm, the ship rocks and reels, she is covered with the waves. It looks as if our poor rowboat will sink to the bottom. Yet Jesus is in our hearts, and that is our safety. We are not saved by seamanship, but by having on board the Lord Paramount, who rules all winds and waves, and never yet lost a vessel that bore the cross at its masthead. Sometimes within our hearts He seems to be asleep. We hear not His voice; we see but little of His face, His eyes are closed, and He Himself is hidden away out of sight. He has not altogether left us, blessed be His name, but He appears to be asleep. Ah, then the ship rocks again, and we reel again, and we wonder that He can still sleep.

Then we are driven in great alarm to prayer, to which we ought to have betaken ourselves long before. It may be that we have been busy with ropes and tackle, strengthening the mast, furling the sail, doing all kinds necessary work, and therefore leaving undone the most necessary work of all, namely, seeking out the Master and telling Him the story of our peril. We pray not till we are forced to our knees, sad sinners that we are. The boat will go down! She will go down! And now it is that we also go down to the cabin and begin to wake Him up with, "Master, save us, we perish!" Then you know what happens, how the gentle rebuke passes over our spirit and we are humbled. But the grander rebuke is heard by the winds and waves, and they are quieted and sleep at the Master's feet, and in us and around us there is a great calm. Oh, how profound the peace! How blessed the stillness! We were about to say, "Would God it would last on forever," but as yet tranquility cannot be perpetual. Our perils of waters will be sure to repeat themselves. Often we go down to the sea in ships, and do business in great waters, so that we see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep. Hear how a poet sings the story—

“Fierce was the wild billow
Dark was the night;
Oars labored heavily
Foam glimmered white;

Trembled the mariners
Peril was near
Then said the God of God—
‘Peace! It is I!’

Ridge of the mountain wave,
Lower your crest!
Wail of Euroclydon,
Be you at rest!

Sorrow can never be—
Darkness must fly—
Where says the Light of Light—
‘Peace! It is I!’

Jesus, Deliverer!
Come You to me:
Soothe You my voyaging
Over life’s sea!

You, when the storm of death
Roars sweeping by,
Whisper, O Truth of Truth!—
‘Peace! It is I!’”

On this occasion I will not further call your attention to the storm, or to the calm, but I beg you to observe the feelings of the disciples about the whole matter. The text says that, “The men marveled, saying, ‘What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him!’”

God evidently thinks much of His people’s inward feelings, for they are recorded here, and in many other cases. The report of what these poor fishermen felt is as carefully made as the record of what their Lord and Master said, since this was necessary to set forth the intent and purpose of their Lord’s utterances. God often regards the external action as a mere husk, but the feeling of His people is the innermost kernel of their life-story, and He prizes it. Some men practice introspection so much that they grow at last to make a kind of fetish of their inward feeling. This is wrong. Yet there is an error on the other side in which we cease to make conscience of our feelings, and think them to be a matter of no consequence, as if there could be real life without feeling. I will cry up faith as much as anyone, but there is no need to depreciate all the other graces, and especially all the emotions, in order to do honor to faith. We may honor the heir, and yet see no reason for slaying all the rest of the royal seed. We must both feel right and believe right, and it is sometimes good for us to have a lesson about how to feel towards our Lord Jesus Christ. Though feeling must be secondary to faith, yet it is far from being unimportant.

At this time we shall principally talk about three feelings towards Christ. First, the men marveled. We will dwell upon that—*marveling at Christ’s work*. Secondly, if you will turn to Mark, the fourth chapter and the forty-first verse, you will see that Mark describes the feeling of the men as fearing “exceedingly.” That shall be our second head—*awe-stricken at His presence*. Thirdly, we see them in our text *admiring His person*,

for they said, “What manner of man,” or, more correctly, “What kind of person is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him!”

I. First, then, **MARVELING AT HIS WORK.** May I ask you to indulge for a little while the feeling of wonder? You believe in Jesus Christ and you are saved. Salvation comes not by wondering, but by believing, but now, having been saved, having passed from death unto life, and having been preserved for years upon the sea of life in the midst of many tempests, and at this moment enjoying a great calm and restfulness of spirit, I invite you to marvel. What wonderful things Jesus has done for me! It is in my power, if I choose, to waste my time in reading romances, but I care nothing for them, for my own life is to me more romantic than romance. The story of God’s goodness to me is more thrilling than any work of fiction could possibly be. I am speaking to some here who I am sure will join with me in acknowledging that there is a freshness, a novelty, a surprise power about the dealings of God with us which we do not meet with anywhere else. Well do we sing in our hymn—

“I need not go abroad for joys—
I have a feast at home,”

and we can also add that we need not go abroad for wonders, for we have a perfect museum at home in our own experience. John Bunyan, when he was describing the experience of his pilgrim, said, “Oh, world of wonders! I can say no less.” And so it is. The life of the godly man on the God side of it, as he receives grace from Jesus, is a gallery of heavenly art, an exhibition of divine skill and power, a wonderland of mercy—

“Still has my life new wonders seen

Of loving-kindness rare;
A monument of grace I stand,
Your goodness to declare.”

Let us think for a minute or two of the parallel between us and these disciples as to wonderment. Consider first—that the instantaneous and profound calm was *contrary to nature*. The Galilean Lake lies in a deep hollow, much below the level of the ocean, and in the sides of the cliffs and hills which shut it in there are valleys and openings which act as funnels, down which blasts of cold air from the mountains often rush upon a sudden. When the time of storm is really on, the Lake of Galilee is not tossed about like an ordinary open sea, but is rent, and torn, and heaved up, and almost hurled out of its bed by downdriving hurricanes and twisting whirlwinds. No sailor knows which way the wind will blow except that it blows all ways at once, and particularly downwards, as if with a direct downdraft from heaven, it blows vessels into the water, and soon, changing its course, lifts it into the air. Any mariner who is not used to that strange, wild sea, would soon lose his head, and despair of life. It is like a boiling cauldron, the spirits of the vast deep stir it to its bottom. Yet this billowy lake in a moment was turned to glass by the words of Jesus, a fact far more wonderful to witness than to read about. Such a change in the uproarious elements was altogether contrary to nature, and therefore “the men marveled.”

Now, beloved, look back upon what your life has been. I do not know exactly where you begin your life story. Some commence in the slime pits of Sodom, in vice and drunkenness. Others begin with wandering on the dark mountains of infidelity, or among the hogs and sloughs of Phariseism and formality. However, it is a miracle that you should have been made to fall at Jesus' feet, and cry out for mercy through His

precious blood. That you should give up all trust and confidence in self, and at the same time should turn away from favorite lusts which you once reveled in, is such a wonder that nobody would have believed it had it been prophesied to them. Certainly you never would have believed it yourself, and yet it has taken place, and other unlooked-for changes have followed it. Why, you have lived since then in a way that would have been once condemned by yourself as utterly absurd. Had an oracle informed you of it you would have ridiculed its forecast. “No,” you would have said, “I shall never be *that*. I shall never feel *that*. I shall never do *that*.” And yet, it has been so with you. The boiling cauldron of your nature has been cooled down and quieted, and an obedient calm has succeeded rebellious rage. Is it not so? I can only say that, if your religion has never produced a wonder, I wonder that you believe in it. If there is not something about you through divine grace which quite surprises yourself, I should not be amazed if one of these days you wake up and find that you have been self-deceived. Far above nature are the ways of grace in men, and if you know them they have produced in you what your natural temperament and your worldly surroundings never could have produced. There has been fire where you looked for snow, and cool streams where you expected flames. A growth of good wheat has been seen where nature would have produced nothing but thorns and briars. Where sin abounded grace has much more abounded, and your life has become the theater of miracles, and the home of wonder.

These men marveled, next, because the calm was so *unexpected by reason*. The ship was near going to pieces. A gust of wind threatened to lift her right out of the water, and the next threatened to plunge her to the bottom of the sea. The weary fishermen certainly did not look for calm; there were no signs of such a gift. When they said, “Master, we perish,” I do not

know what they thought their Lord would do, but they assuredly never dreamed that He would stand up in the back part of the ship, and say, “Winds and waves, what are you doing? Your Master is here. Be still.” That was beyond their nautical experience, and their fathers had never seen such wonders in their day. They could not hope that in a moment they should be in a profound calm.

Now, may I ask you to wonder a little at what the Lord has done for you? Has He not done for you, what you never expected? To speak for myself, I never reckoned upon standing here to preach to thousands of God's people. When I was first brought to Jesus I had no such hope. Why should I be taken from the school and from the desk to lead a part of His flock? I wonder more and more that by His grace I am what I am. Some of you, when you sit at the communion table, may well feel that the most wonderful thing about it is that *you* should find a welcome place at the Lord's own festival. Did some of you expect, a year ago, that you would be here now, on a Thursday night, listening to a talk about Jesus Christ? Why, you hardly know how you got here. You can scarcely tell the way by which the Lord has led you to be a lover of the gospel. Look at your inner feelings, as well as your outward position, are you not often made the subject of desires, of longings, of groaning, and on the other hand, of enjoyments, of sweet and precious endearments, of high and gracious expectations, which utterly surprise you as you remember what you used to be? Are you not “like them that dream” when you think over the Lord's loving-kindness? And if others say, “The Lord has done great things for you,” does not your heart chime in with all its bells, and ring out notes of joy, “The Lord has done great things for us, of which we are glad”? Come, indulge your wonder. Admire and marvel at the exceeding grace of God towards you in working contrary to nature, and contrary to all reasonable

expectations, and bringing you to be His dear and favored child. Marvels of mercy, wonders of grace, belong unto God Most High.

Besides this, the idea of a storm which should immediately be followed by a great calm was *a strikingly new experience*. These fishermen of the Galilean Lake had never seen it after this fashion before. We read in the Old Testament of some, to whom it was said, “You have not gone this way before,” and certainly the same might have been said to these disciples. “You have been in tempests, but you never before in your lives were one minute in a tempest and the next in calm.” It must have been enough to make them weep for joy, or, at least, it must have led them to hold up their hands in glad astonishment. The deliverance worked by their Lord was so fresh, so altogether new that marveling was natural. Well, now, brothers and sisters, to come back to ourselves again—have you not often experienced that which has astounded you by its novelty? Are not God’s mercies new every morning? I address some of you who have been 40 or 50 years in the ways of God, do you not find a continual freshness in the manifestations of God’s goodness to you both in providence and grace? Let me ask you, has religious life been to you like mounting a treadmill—monotonous, wearisome, and uniform? If so, there is something wrong about you, for while we live near to God, we dwell under new heavens and walk upon a new earth. When a man travels through the Alps on a bright sunshiny day, all things are as new, as though born that morning, that drop of dew on the grass, he never saw before, that drifting cloud has newly arrived upon the scene. Never before has the traveler seen the face of nature radiant with the same smile as that which now delights him. Has it not been so with you in the journey of life? Have not all things become new and remained new since you were born anew? Has not grace been heaped

upon grace, so that each new experience has excelled its predecessor? Still have I beheld fresh beauties in my Master's face, fresh glories in my Master's word, fresh assurance of His faithfulness in His providence, fresh power in my Master's Spirit as He has dealt graciously with my soul. I know that it is so with you, and I want you to marvel at it that God should take so much trouble to manifest Himself to poor creatures that are not worth His treading on, that He should devise a thousand things most rare and new for such insignificant insects of a day as we are. Glory be to His blessed name, it may well be said of us, "The men marveled and said, 'What manner of person is this who deals so with His people?'" "Who is a God like unto You? What is man that You are mindful of Him, and the son of man that you visit him?"

These three things made the disciples wonder.

There was another. I should think that it was a great marvel to them that calm was sent *so soon* after the storm. Man needs time, but God's runs very quickly. Man travels with weary feet, the Lord rides upon a cherub and does fly, yes, He flies upon the wings of the wind. The particles of air and the drops of water were all in confusion through the tempest, rushing as if chaos had come again, rising in whirlwinds and falling in waterfalls, yet they did but see the face of their Maker, and they were still. In one single instant there was calm. Have not you and I experienced instantaneous workings of divine grace upon our spirits? It may not be so with all, but some of us at the first instant of our faith lost the burden of sin in a moment. Our load was all gone before we knew where we were. The change from sorrow to joy was not worked in us by degrees, but in a moment the sun leaped above the horizon, and the night of our soul was over. Has it not been so since? We have been in the midst of God's people, as heavy as lead, and without power to enjoy a truth, or to perform a holy act. The hymns seemed a

mockery and the prayer an empty form, and yet in a single moment the rod of the Lord has touched the rock and the waters have flowed forth, and by the very means of grace which seemed so dull and powerless, we have been enlivened and comforted. We have blessed the Lord that we ever came to the place. I do not know how it is that we undergo such sudden changes. Yes I do. It is because God works all good things in us, and He is able to accomplish in an instant that which we could not effect in a year. He can in a moment change our prison into a palace, and our ashes into beauty. He can bid us put off our sackcloth and put on the wedding garments of delight. As in the twinkling of an eye this corruptible shall put on incorruption, so in an instant our spiritual death can blossom into heavenly life. This is a great wonder. Go and marvel at what the Lord has so speedily done for you.

And then to think that it should have been *so perfect*. When a storm subsides, the sea is generally angry for hours, if not for days. A great wind at Dover yesterday would make the Channel rough for some time. But when our Lord Jesus makes calm the sea forgets her raging and smiles at once. In fact, “He makes the storm calm, so that the waves are still.” The winds hush all their fury and are quiet in an instant when He bids them rest. And oh, when the Lord gives joy and peace and blessedness to His people, He does not do it by halves. “When He, gives quietness, who then can make trouble?” There is no such thing as a half-blessing for a child of God. The Lord gives Him fullness of peace—“the peace of God which passes all understanding.” He causes him to enjoy quiet through believing, and He enables him to rejoice in tribulation also, for tribulation works blessing to the souls of men.

I feel that I cannot speak as I could wish, but I shall finish this division of the discourse by saying that one point of wonder was that the calm was *worked so evidently by the Master’s*

word. He spoke and it was done. He poured no oil upon the waters. His will was revealed in a word, and that will was law. Not an atom of matter dares to move if the divine decree forbids, the sovereignty of Jesus is supreme, and His word is with power.

Now, dear friend, I know that there must have been very much that is wonderful in your life as a Christian, but do not think yourself the only partaker of such wonderment. Let us all sit down, and inquire each one, “Why is this to me? Why me, Lord? How can such great grace be shown to me, and how can the Son of God stoop to look at me and take me into marriage union with Himself, and promise that I shall live because He lives, that I shall reign because He reigns?” Sit down, I say, and believably marvel, and marvel, and marvel, and never leave off marveling. And let me drop one little word into your ear. Is there something that you need of God concerning which unbelief has said that it is too wonderful to be expected? Let that be the reason why you shall expect it. There is nothing to a Christian as probable as the unexpected, and there is nothing which God is so likely to do for us as that which is above all we ask or even think. God is at home in wonderland. If what you need is a commonplace thing, perhaps it may not come, but if it strikes you as a marvel, you are in a fit state of heart to honor God for it, and you are likely to receive it. Do not think that because between you and heaven, if you reach it, there will be a giant causeway of marvels, therefore you will never get there. But, on the contrary, conclude that the God who began to save you by so great a miracle as the gift and death of His own dear Son, will go on to perfect your salvation even if He has to fling into the sea a thousand heavens to make stepping stones for you to tread upon so you can reach His presence. “He that spared not His own Son, but freely delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all

things?” Therefore expect wonders. These men marveled. Expect to keep on marveling till you get to heaven, and to keep on marveling when you are in heaven, and throughout eternity. Wonder will be a principal ingredient of our adoration in heaven. We—

“Shall sing with wonder and surprise
His loving-kindness in the skies.”

I have been somewhat long on this first head. I will therefore give you a little, and only a little, upon the second.

II. Let us now see how the disciples were **AWE-STRICKEN AT OUR LORD’S PRESENCE**. Mark says that “the men feared greatly.” They feared greatly because they found themselves in the presence of one who had stilled the winds and the waves. Brothers and sisters, it is well to cultivate that holy familiarity which comes from nearness to Jesus, and yet we ought always to be humbled by a sense of that nearness. Permit me to remind the boldest believer that our loving Lord is still God over all. He is to be honored and revered, worshipped and adored, by all who draw near to Him. However much He is our brother, He says, “You call me Master and Lord, and you do well, for so I am.” He is all the greater because of His condescension to us, and we are bound to recognize this.

Whenever Jesus is near, the feeling of holy awe and solemn dread will steal over true disciples. I am afraid of that way of being so familiar with Christ as to talk of Him as, “dear Jesus,” and “dear Lord,” as if He were some Jack or Harry that we might pat on the back whenever we liked. No, no. This will never do. It is not such language as men would use to their prince, let them not thus address the King of kings. However favored we may be, we are but dust and ashes, and our spirit must be chastened with reverence.

When Jesus is near us we ought to fear exceedingly *because we have doubted Him*. If you had been suspicious of a dear friend, and had indulged hard thoughts about him, and all of a sudden you found yourself sitting in the same room with him, you would feel awkward, especially if you understood that he knew what you had said and thought. Oh, you will feel ashamed of yourself, my brothers and sisters, if Jesus shall draw near to you. The wisest thing you can do in such a case is to say, “My Master, my Lord, since You favor me with Your presence, I will first fall at Your feet, and confess that I doubted You, that I thought that the stormy wind would swallow up the vessel, and that the waves would devour both You and me. Forgive me, Master; forgive me for having thought so evil of You.” Whenever we are near to Christ, one of the first feelings should be that of great humiliation. Let us fall at His feet, and confess how ill we have thought of Him.

Brethren, *we have been as foolish as to fear His creatures*, paying to them a sort of worship of fear, as if they had more power to harm than Jesus had to help. We clothe wind and sea with attributes which belong only to God, and look upon our trials as if they tried the Lord too, and vanquished Him because they vanquish us. Are we not because of this smitten with dread in the presence of the Christ?

And then the next feeling should be—since He has come to me, this Mighty One who has worked such marvels for me, *let me try to order myself aright in His presence*. I notice whenever the Lord Jesus Christ is very present in this congregation how carefully everybody sings. I notice about tune, time, and tone a difference from the singing which is usual, and even from that singing which comes of having an acquired skill in music. Though it may seem a trifle, yet I cannot help observing that when people come to the communion table as a matter of routine they frequently behave roughly, walking noisily and

looking about, or else they sit like statues, with a chill propriety of posture and vacancy of countenance. But you will notice that fellowship with Jesus affects the glance of the eye, the thoughts of the soul, and consequently the movements of the body.

When a man is truly conscious that Jesus, the Wonder-worker, is near, he fears exceedingly. If ever you say to Jesus, “You know that I love You,” mind you put, “Lord,” before it—“Lord, You know all things,” for He is your Lord still. Where Jesus is, there is godly fear, which is by no means the same as slavish fear. Every true child has a reverence for his father. Every true daughter has a loving respect for her mother. So is it with us towards our Lord Jesus. We owe so much to Him, and He is so great and so good, and we are so little and so sinful, that there must be a blessed sense of holy awe whenever we come before Him.

Indulge it. Indulge it now. You know how John puts it, “When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead.” Why, that is the man who leaned His head on the bosom of Christ. Yes, that is the man who fell at His feet as dead. If your head has never leaned upon the bosom of the Lord, I should not wonder if you can hold it up in His presence. But when it has once lain there in confiding love, reposing upon boundless mercy, then that head of yours will lie in the dust uncrowned if God has honored it, for it will be your delight to cast your crown at His feet, and give Him all the glory. O, reign forever, King of kings, and Lord of lords! Conquer me, my Lord, subdue me perfectly. Make dust of me beneath Your feet, if You shall be but the tenth of an inch the higher for my down-casting, Oh, my Master, and my Lord, with joy I would shrink to nothing before You, that You may be all in all. May this be your feeling and mine. The men feared exceedingly; let us fear also, after a believing sort.

III. Now to close. The third thing is **ADMIRING THE PERSON OF JESUS**, for these men who marveled, and who feared exceedingly, admired the person of Him who had set them free from the storm, saying, “What manner of person is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” Come, let us admire and adore the nature of Christ which is altogether beyond our comprehension. The winds and the sea obeyed Him, though He had slept like other men. When His head was that of an infant the crown of the universe was about His brow. When He was in the carpenter’s shop He was still the Creator of all worlds. When He went to die upon the tree, a myriad of angels would have come to rescue Him if He had but willed it. Even in His humiliation He was still the Son of the Highest, God over all, blessed forever. Now that He is exalted in heaven, do not forget the other side of the question, believe that He is just as much man now as when He was here—as truly a brother of our race as He is God over all, blessed forevermore.

Let us now give our hearts to admiration of Him in *His complex nature which is beyond comprehension*. He is my next of kin, and yet my God, at once my Redeemer and my Lord. We may each one cry with Job, “I know that my next of kin lives, and that He shall stand in the latter day upon the earth, and though after my skin, worms devour this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” Because He lives as my kinsman—there is the sweetness of it, and because He is my God—there is the glory of it. He is both tenderly compassionate for my infirmities, and gloriously able to overcome them. He is a complete Savior because He is both human and divine. Come, my soul, bow down in wonder that ever God should send such a Savior as this to you. A person asked me the other day whether I had seen a book entitled “Sixteen Saviors.” I answered—“No, I have not and I do not want to know of 16 saviors. I am perfectly satisfied with one.” If all who dwell in heaven and

earth could be made into saviors, and the whole were put together, you might blow them away as a child blows away thistledown, but there is this one Savior, the Son of man and yet the mighty God, and He cannot be moved. Joy then, my brethren, and rejoice in the nature of your blessed Lord.

Next, *rejoice in His power which has no limit*, so that even the winds and the waves obey Him. The winds—can they have a master? The waves that cast their spray upon the face of princes, can they acknowledge a sovereign? Yes, the most fickle of elements, and the most unruly of forces, are all under the power of Jesus. Joy and rejoice in this. Little as well as great—yon Atlantic that divides the world, and that little drop in the basin of Gennesaret—are alike in the hand of Jesus. The power of God is seen in a falling mountain when it crashes village, but it is as truly present when the seeds are scattered from the pod of the gorse, or a rose leaf falls upon the garden walk. God is seen when an angel flashes from heaven to earth, and is He not seen when a bee flits from flower to flower? Jesus is the master of the little as well as of the great, yes, King of all things, and I joy this moment to think that even the wicked actions of ungodly men, though they are not deprived of their sinfulness, so as to make the men the less responsible, are, nevertheless, overruled by that great Lord of ours, who works all things according to the counsel of His will. In the front I see Jesus leading the van of providence. Behind He guards the rear. On the heights I see Jesus reigning King of kings and Lord of lords. In the deeps I mark the terror of His justice as He binds the dragon with His chain. Let the universal cry of “Hallelujah” rise unto the Son of God, world without end.

Sit down and admire and adore His unlimited power, and then conclude by paying homage to *that sovereignty of His which tolerates no question*, for the winds and waves did not only perform His will, but, as if they were waking into life and rising

into intelligent knowledge of Him, they are said to *obey* Him, from which I gather that Christ is not only the forceful master of unintelligent agencies, but that He is the sovereign master of things that can obey Him, and He will be obeyed. Ah, you may bite at Him, and hiss at Him, but as the viper broke his teeth against the file, yet hurt it not, so shall the ungodly exercise all their craft and all their strength, and the end shall be shame and confusion of face to them.

The kingdom of our Lord and Master is by some thought to be a long way off, and faint-hearted men half despair of His cause, but He that sits in the heavens laughs at the impatience of saints as well as at the impiety of sinners, for He knows that all is well. Out of seeming evil He produces good, and from that good a better still, and better still in infinite progression. All things move towards His eternal coronation. As once every atom of history converged to His cross, so does it today project itself towards His crown. The Lord Jesus comes to His well-earned throne as surely as He came to the shameful cross. He comes, and when He comes it shall be as when He rose in the ship and rebuked the winds, and the men marveled, for all storms of raging passion, conflicting opinion and fierce warfare shall be hushed, and He shall be admired in His saints, and glorified in all them that believe, while even unbelievers shall marvel at Him and say, “What manner of person is this, that even earth and hell obey Him, and all things are subject to His sovereign power!” Happy are the eyes that shall see Him in that day with joy. Happy are the men who shall sit at the right hand of the Coming One. Oh, beloved, your eyes and mine shall see it if we have first looked to the Redeemer upon the cross and found salvation in Him. Courage, brethren, let the waves dash and the winds howl. The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge. All is safe because of His presence, and all

shall end gloriously because of His manifestation. The Lord
bless you, in tempest and in calm, for Christ's sake. Amen.

1687 THE LAW WRITTEN ON THE HEART – JER. 31:33

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, October 29, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“After those days,” says the Lord, “I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.” — Jeremiah 31:33

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Jeremiah 31]

LAST LORD’S-DAY MORNING [GOD’S NON-REMEMBRANCE OF SIN — NO. 1685], we spoke of the first great blessing of the covenant of grace, namely, the full forgiveness of sins. Then we dilated with delight upon that wonderful promise, “Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more,” I hope our consciences were pacified and our hearts filled with wonder as we thought of God’s casting behind His back all the sins of His people, so that we could sing with David, “Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities.” This great blessing of pardoned sin is always connected with the renewal of the heart. It is not given because of the change of heart, but it is always given with the change of heart. If God takes away the guilt of sin He is sure at the same time to remove

the power of sin. If He puts away our offenses against His law, He also makes us desire in the future to obey the law.

In our text we observe the excellence and dignity of the law of God. The gospel has not come into the world to set aside the law. Salvation by grace does not erase a single precept of the law, nor lower the standard of justice in the smallest degree, on the contrary, as Paul says, we do not make void the law through faith, but we establish the law. The law is never honored by fallen man till he comes from under its condemning rule, walks by faith, and lives under the covenant of grace. When we were under the covenant of works, we dishonored the law, but now we venerate it as a perfect display of moral rectitude. Our Lord Jesus has shown to an assembled universe that the law is not to be trifled with, and that every transgression and disobedience must receive a just recompense of reward, since the sin which He bore on our account brought upon Him, as our innocent substitute, the doom of suffering and death. Our Lord Jesus has testified by His death that, even if sin is pardoned, yet it is not put away without an expiatory sacrifice. The death of Christ rendered more honor to the law than all the obedience of all who were ever under it could have rendered, and it was a more forcible vindication of eternal justice than if all the redeemed had been cast into hell. When the Holy One smites His own Son, His wrath against sin is evident to all. But this is not enough. The law is in the gospel not only vindicated by the sacrifice of Christ, but it is honored by the work of the Spirit of God upon the hearts of men. Whereas under the old covenant the commands of the law excited our evil natures to rebellion, under the covenant of grace we consent unto the law that it is good, and our prayer is, “Teach me to do Your will, O Lord.” What the law could not do because of the weakness of the flesh, the gospel has done through the Spirit of God. Thus the law is held in honor among

believers, and though they are no more under it as a covenant of works, they are in a measure conformed to it as they see it in the life of Christ Jesus, and they delight in it after the inward man. Things required by the law are bestowed by the gospel. God demands obedience under the law. God works obedience under the gospel. Holiness is asked of us by the law, holiness is worked in us by the gospel, so that the difference between the economics of law and gospel is not to be found in any diminution of the demands of the law, but in the actual giving unto the redeemed that which the law exacted of them, and in the working in them that which the law required.

Notice beloved friends, that under the old covenant the law of God was given in a most awe-inspiring manner, and yet it did not secure loyal obedience. God came to Sinai, and the mountain was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire, and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. So terrible was the sight of God manifesting Himself on Sinai that even Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake." Out of the thick darkness which covered the sublime summit, there came forth the sound of a trumpet, waxing exceedingly loud and long, and a voice proclaimed one by one the ten great statutes and ordinances of the moral law. I think I see the people at a distance, with bounds set about the mountain, crouching with abject fear, and at last entreating that these words might not be spoken to them anymore. So terrible was the sound of Jehovah's voice, even when He was not declaring vengeance, but simply expounding righteousness, that the people could not endure it any longer, and yet no permanent impression was left upon their minds, no obedience was shown in their lives. Men may be cowed by power, but they can only be converted by love. The sword of justice has less power over human hearts than the scepter of mercy.

Further to preserve that law, God Himself inscribed it upon two tables of stone, and He gave these tablets into the hands of Moses. What a treasure! Surely no particles of matter had ever been so honored as these slabs, which had been touched by the finger of God, and bore on them the legible impression of His mind. But these laws on stone were not kept; neither the stones nor the laws were revered. Moses had not long gone up into the mountain before the once awe-struck people were bowing before the golden calf, forgetful of Sinai and its solemn voice, and making for themselves the likeness of an ox that eats grass, and bowing before it as the symbol of the godhead. When Moses came down from the hill with those priceless tablets in His hands, He saw the people wholly given up to base idolatry, and in his indignation, he dashed the tablets to the ground and broke them in pieces, as well he might when he saw how the people had spiritually broken them and violated every word of the Most High. From all this I gather that the law is never really obeyed as the result of servile fear. You may preach up the anger of God, and the terrors of the world to come, but these do not melt the heart to loyal obedience. It is necessary for other ends that man should know of God's resolve to punish sin, but the heart is not by that fact won to virtue. Man revolts yet more and more, so stubborn is he that the more he is commanded the more he rebels. The decalogue upon your Church walls and in your daily service has its ends, but it can never be operative upon men's lives until it is also written on their hearts. Tables of stone are hard, and men count obedience to God's law to be a hard thing. The commands are judged to be stony while the heart is stony, and men harden themselves because the way of the precept is hard to their evil minds. Stones are proverbially cold, and the law seems a cold, chill thing, for which we have no love as long as the appeal is to our fears. Tablets of stone, though apparently durable, can

readily enough be broken, and so can God's commands, so they are indeed broken every day by us, and those who have the clearest knowledge of the will of God nevertheless offend against Him. As long as they have nothing to keep them in check but a servile dread of punishment, or a selfish hope of reward, they yield no loyal homage to the statutes of the Lord.

At this time I have to show you the way in which God secures to Himself obedience to His law in quite another fashion, not by thundering it out from Sinai, nor by engraving it upon tablets of stone, but by coming in gentleness and infinite compassion into the hearts of men, and there, upon fleshy tables, inscribing the commands of His law in such a manner that they are joyfully obeyed, and men become the willing servants of God.

This is the second great privilege of the covenant, not second in value, but in order — “who forgives all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases.” It is thus described by Ezekiel, “And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My judgments, and do them.” In the Epistle to the Hebrews we have it in another form, and we read it thus, “Behold, the days come, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in My covenant, and I regarded them not, says the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord; I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people.” This is so inestimably precious that you who know the Lord are longing for it, and it is your great delight that it is to be worked in you by the sovereign grace of God.

We shall, first of all, look at *the tablets* — “I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.” Secondly, at *the writing*, thirdly, at *the writer*, and fourthly, at *the results* which come of this wondrous writing. O that the Spirit who has promised to lead us into all truth may illuminate us now.

I. First, I invite your attention to **THE TABLETS** upon which God writes His law — “I will put My law in their inward parts.” Just as once He put the two tables into the ark of gopher wood, so He will put His holy law into our inward nature, and enclose it in our thoughts and minds and memories and affections, as a jewel in a case. Then He adds, “And I will write it in their hearts.” Just as the holy words were engraved upon stone, so shall they now be written in the heart, in the handwriting of the Lord Himself. Mark, that, the law is written not *on* the heart, but *in* the heart, in the very texture and constitution of it, so that into the center and core of the soul, obedience shall be infused as a vital principle.

Thus, you see, the Lord has selected for His tablets *that which is the seat of life*. It is in the heart that life is to be found, a wound there is fatal. Where the seat of life is there the seat of obedience shall be. In the heart life has its permanent palace and perpetual abode, and God says that, instead of writing His holy law on stones which may be left at a distance, He will write it on the heart, which must always be within us. Instead of placing the law upon phylacteries which can be bound between the eyes but may easily be taken off, He will write it in the heart, where it must always remain. He has bidden His people write His laws upon the posts of their doors and upon their gates, but in those conspicuous places they might become as familiar as to be unnoticed. The Lord now Himself writes them where they must always be noted and always produce effect. If men have the precepts written in the abode of their life, they live with the law and cannot live without it. It is a wonderful thing

that God should do this. It displays infinitely greater wisdom than if the law had been inscribed on slabs of granite or engraved on plates of gold. What wisdom is this which operates upon the original spring of life, so that all that flows forth from man shall come from a sanctified fountainhead!

Observe next, that not only is the heart the seat of life, but it is *the governing power*. It is from the heart, as from a royal metropolis, that the imperial commands of the man are issued by which hand and foot, and eye and tongue, and all the members are ordered. If the heart is right, then the other powers must yield submission to its sway, and become right too. If God writes His law upon the heart, then the eyes will purify their glances, and the tongue will speak according to rule, and the hand will move and the feet will travel as God ordains. When the heart is fully influenced by God's Spirit, then the will and the intellect, the memory and the imagination, and everything else which makes up the inward man, comes under cheerful allegiance to the King of kings. God Himself says, "Give me your heart," for the heart is the key of the entire position, hence the supreme wisdom of the Lord in setting up His law where it becomes operative upon the entire man.

But before God can write upon a man's heart *it must be prepared*. It is most unfit to be a writing tablet for the Lord until it is renewed. The heart must first of all undergo erasures. What is written on the heart, already, some of us know to our deep regret. Original sin has cut deep lines, Satan has scored his horrible handwriting in black letters, and our evil habits have left their impressions. How can the Lord write there? No one would expect the holy God to inscribe His holy law upon an unholy mind. The former things must be taken away, that there may be clear space upon which new and better things may be engraved. But who can erase these lines? "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do

good, that are accustomed to do evil.” The God, who can take away the spots from the leopard, and the blackness from the Ethiopian, can also remove the evil lines which now deface the heart.

As the heart must undergo erasure, it must also experience a thorough cleansing, not of the surface only, but of its entire fabric. Truly, brethren, it was far easier for Hercules to purge the Augean stables than for our hearts to be purged, for the sin that lies within us is not an accumulation of external defilement, but an inward, all-pervading corruption. The taint of secret and spiritual evil is in man’s natural life, every pulse of his soul is disordered by it. The eggs of all crimes are within our being. The accursed virus, from whose deadly venom every foul design will come, is present in the soul. Not only tendency to sin, but sin itself has taken possession of the soul, and blackened and polluted it through and through, till there is not a fiber of the heart unstained with iniquity. God cannot write His law in our inward parts till with water and with blood He has purged us. Tables on which the Lord shall write must be clean, therefore the heart on which God is to engrave His law must be a cleansed heart. And it is a great joy to perceive that from the person of our Lord heart-cleansing blood and water flowed, so that the provision is equal to the necessity. Blessed be the name of our gracious God, He knows how to erase the evil and to cleanse the soul through His Holy Spirit’s applying the work of Jesus to us.

In addition to this, the heart needs to be softened, for the heart is naturally hard, and in some men it has become harder than an adamant stone. They have resisted God’s love till they are impervious to it. They have stood out obstinately against God’s will till they have become desperately set on mischief, and nothing can affect them. God must melt the heart, must transform it from granite into flesh, and He has the power to

do it. Blessed be His name, according to the covenant of grace, He has promised to work this wonder, and He will.

Nor would the softening be enough, for there are some who have a tenderness of the most deceiving kind. They receive the word with joy, they feel every expression of it, but they speedily go their way and forget what manner of men they are. They are as impressible as the water, but the impression is as soon removed, so that another change is needed, namely, to make them retentive of that which is good. Otherwise you might engrave and re-engrave, but like an inscription upon wax, it would be gone in a moment if exposed to heat. The devil, the world, and the temptations of life, would soon erase out of the heart, all that God had written there if He did not create it anew with the faculty of holding fast that which is good.

In a word, the heart of man needs to be totally changed, even as Jesus said to Nicodemus, “You must be born again.” Dear hearers, we preach to you that whoever believes in Christ has everlasting life, and we speak neither more nor less than the truth of God when we say so. But yet, believe us, there must be as great a change in the heart as if a man were slain and made alive again. There must be a new creation, a resurrection from the dead, old things must pass away, and all things must become new. God’s law can never be written upon the old natural heart. There must be a new and spiritual nature given, and then upon the center of that new life, upon the throne of that new power within our life, God will set up the proclamation of His blessed will, and what He commands shall be done. So, then, you see these tablets are not so easily written upon as perhaps we first thought. If God is to write the law upon the heart, the heart must be prepared, and in order to being prepared, it must be entirely renewed by a miracle of mercy, such as can only be worked by that omnipotent hand which made both heaven and earth.

II. Secondly, let us pass on to notice **THE WRITING**. “I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.” What is this writing? First, *the matter of it is the law of God*. God writes upon the hearts of His people that which is already revealed, He inscribes there nothing novel and unrevealed, but His own will which He has already given us in the book of the law. He writes upon the heart by gracious operation that which He has already written in the Bible by gracious revelation. He writes, not philosophy, nor imagination, nor superstition, nor fanaticism, nor idle fancies. If any man says to me, “God has written such and such a thing on my heart,” I reply, “Show it to me in the Book,” for if it is not according to the other Scriptures it is not a scripture of God. A fancy as to a man’s being a prophet, or a prince, or an angel, may be on a man’s heart, but God did not write it there, for His own declaration is, “I will write My law in their hearts,” and He speaks not of anything beyond. The nonsense of modern pretenders to prophecy is no writing of God; it would be a dishonor to a sane man to ascribe it to Him. How can it be of the Lord? He here promises to write His own law on the heart, but nothing else. Be content to have the law written on your soul, and wander not into vain imaginings lest you receive a strong delusion to believe a lie.

Observe, however, that God says He will write His whole law on the heart—this is included in the words, “My law.” God’s work is complete in all its parts, and beautifully harmonious. He will not write one command and leave out the rest as so many do in their reforms. They become indignant in their virtue against a particular sin, but they riot in other evils. Drunkenness is to them the most damnable of all transgressions, but covetousness and uncleanness they wink at. They denounce theft, and yet defraud, cry out against pride and yet indulge envy. Thus they are partial and do the work of the

Lord deceitfully. It must not be so. God does not set before us a partial holiness, but the whole moral law. “I will write My law in their hearts.” Human reforms are generally lopsided, but the Lord’s work of grace is balanced and proportionate. The Lord writes the perfect law in the hearts of men because He intends to produce perfect men.

Mark, again, that on the heart there is written not the law toned down and altered, but, “My law”— that very same law which was at first written on the heart of unfallen man. Paul says of natural men, that “they show the work of the law written in their hearts.” There is enough of the light left on the conscience to condemn men for most of their iniquities. The original record of the law upon man’s heart at his creation has been injured and almost obliterated by man’s fall and his subsequent transgressions, but the Lord, in renewing the heart, makes the writing fresh and vivid, even the writing of the first principles of righteousness and truth.

But to come a little closer to the matter; what does the Scripture mean by writing the law of God in the heart? *The writing itself includes a great many things.* A man who has the law of God written on his heart, first of all, knows it; he is instructed in the ordinances and statutes of the Lord. He is an illuminated person, and no longer one of those who knows not the law and is cursed. God’s Spirit has taught him what is right and what is wrong. He knows this by heart, and therefore can no longer put darkness for light, and light for darkness.

This law, next, abides upon his memory. When he had it only upon a tablet, he must necessarily go into his house to look at it, but now he carries it about with him in his heart, and knows at once what will be right and what will be wrong. God has given him a touchstone by which he tries things. He finds that “all is not gold that glitters,” and all is not holy which pretends to that character. He separates the precious from the

vile, and does this habitually, for his knowledge of God's law and his memory of it are attended by a discernment of spirit which God has worked in him, so that he quickly discerns what is according to the mind of God and what is not. Now this is a great point, for some things are commonly done by men which they will even defend, and say that there is no wrong in them. But, according to the divine rule they are utterly unjust. God's people judge these things, and take no pleasure in them. A sacred instinct warns the believer of the approach of sin. Long before public sentiment has proclaimed a hue and cry against questionable practices, the Christian man, even if deluded for a while by current custom, yet feels a trembling and uneasiness. Even if he consents outwardly being overborne by general opinion, a something within protests, and leads him to consider whether the matter can be defended. As soon as he detects the evil, he shrinks from it. It is a grand thing to possess a universal detector, so that, go where you may, you are not dependent upon the judgment of others, and therefore are not deceived as multitudes are.

This, however, is only a part of the matter and a very small part comparatively. The law is written on a man's heart further than this, when he consents unto the law that it is good, when his conscience, being restored, cries, "Yes, that is so, and ought to be so. That command by which God has forbidden a certain course is a proper and prudent command, it ought to be enjoined." It is a hopeful sign when a man no longer wishes that the divine commands were other than they are, but confirms them by the verdict of his judgment. Are there not men who in their anger wish that killing were not murder? Are there not others who do not steal, and yet wish they might take their neighbors' goods? Are there not many who wish that fornication and adultery were not vices? This proves that their hearts are depraved, but it is not so with the regenerate, they

would not have the law altered for any reason. Their vote is with the law, they regard it as the guardian of society, the basis on which the peace of the universe can alone be built, for only by righteousness can any order of things be established. If we could possess the wisdom of God, we would make just that law which God has made, for the law is holy, and just, and good, and promotes man's highest advantage. It is a great thing when a man gets as far as that.

But, furthermore, there is worked in the heart by God a love to the law as well as a consent to it, such a love that the man thanks God that He has given him such a fair and lovely representation of what perfect holiness should be, that He has given such measuring lines, by which he knows how a house is to be built in which God can dwell. Thus thanking the Lord, his prayer, desire, longing, hungering, and thirsting, are after righteousness that he may in all things be according to the mind of God. It is a glorious thing when the heart delights itself in the law of the Lord, and finds therein its solace and pleasure. The law is fully written on the heart when a man takes pleasure in holiness, and feels a deep pain whenever sin approaches him. Oh, my dear friend, the Lord has done great things for you when every evil thing is obnoxious to you. Even though you fall into sin through the infirmity of your flesh, yet if it causes you intense agony and sorrow it is because God has written His law in your heart. Even though you cannot be as holy as you want to be, yet if the ways of holiness are your pleasure, if they are the very element in which you live as much as the fish lives in the sea, then you are the subject of a very wonderful change of heart. It is not so much what you do, as what you delight to do, which becomes the clearest test of your character. Many strictly religious people who go to and fro to church and chapel would be uncommonly glad if they did not feel bound to do so. Is not their public worshipping a dead formality? A great many

people have family prayers and private prayers who wish they could be rid of the nuisance. Is there any religion in bodily exercises which are burdensome to the heart? Nothing is acceptable to God until it is acceptable to you. God will not receive your sacrifice unless you offer it willingly. How contrary this is to the notion of many, for they say, “You see I deny myself by going so many times to a place of worship and by private prayer, therefore I must be truly religious.” The very reverse is far nearer the truth. When it becomes a misery to serve God, then indeed the heart is far away from spiritual health, for when the heart is renewed, it delights to worship and serve the Lord. Instead of saying, “I would omit prayer if I could,” the regenerate mind cries, “I wish I could be always praying.” Instead of saying, “I would keep away from the assembly of God’s people if I could,” the newborn nature wishes like David to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. This is a great evidence of the writing of the law upon the heart, when holiness becomes a pleasure, and sin becomes a sorrow. When this is done, what great things God has done for us!

The main point of the whole is this, that whereas our nature was once contrary to the law of God, so that whatever God forbade we at once desired, and whatever God commanded we therefore began to dislike, the Holy Spirit comes and changes our nature, and makes it congruous to the law, so that now whatever God forbids we forbid, and whatever God commands, our will commands. How much better to have the law written upon the heart than upon tables of stone!

If anybody should inquire *how the Lord keeps the writing upon the heart legible*, I should like to spend a minute or two in showing the process. How the Holy Spirit first writes the law on the heart I cannot tell. The outward means are the preaching of the word and the reading of it, but how the Holy Spirit directly

operates on the soul we do not know, it is one of the great mysteries of grace. This much we know within ourselves, that whereas we were blind now we see and whereas we abhorred the law of God we now feel an intense delight in it. We also know that the Holy Spirit worked this change, but how He did it remains unknown. That part of His holy office which we can discern is done according to the usual laws of mental operation. He enlightens by knowledge, convinces by argument, leads by persuasion, strengthens by instruction, and so forth. So far also we know that one way by which the law is kept written upon a Christian's heart is this—a sense of God's presence. The believer feels that he could not sin with God looking on. It would need a brazen face for a man to play the traitor in the presence of a king, such things are done “under the rose,” as men word it, but not before the monarch's face. So the Christian feels that he dwells in God's sight, and this forbids him to disobey. The eye of the heavenly Father is the best monitor of the child of God.

Next, the Christian has a lively sense within him of the degradation which sin once brought upon him. If there is one thing I never can forget personally, it is the horror of my heart while I was yet under sin. God revealed my state to me. Ah, friends, the old proverb that a burnt child dreads the fire has an intensity of truth about it in the case of one who has ever been burnt by sin so as to be driven to despair by it. He hates it with a perfect hatred, and by that means, God writes the law upon his heart.

But a sense of love is a yet more powerful factor. Let a man know that God loves him, let him feel sure that God always did love him from before the foundations of the world, and he must try to please God. Let him be assured that the Father loved him so much as to give His only-begotten Son to die that he might live through Him, and he must love God and hate evil.

A sense of pardon, of adoption, and of God's sweet favor both in providence and in grace, must sanctify a man. He cannot willfully offend against such love. On the contrary, he feels himself bound to obey God in return for such unsearchable grace, and thus by a sense of love does God write His law upon the hearts of His people.

Another very powerful pen with which the Lord writes is to be found in the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we see Jesus spit upon, and scourged, and crucified, we feel that we must hate sin with all the intensity of our nature. Can you count the purple drops of His redeeming blood and then go back to live in the iniquity which cost the Lord so dear? Impossible! The death of Christ writes the law of God very deeply upon the central heart of man. The cross is the crucifier of sin.

Besides that, God actually establishes His holy law in the throne of the heart by giving us a new and heavenly life. There is within a Christian an immortal principle which cannot sin because it is born of God, and cannot die, for it is the living and incorruptible seed which lives and abides forever. In regeneration there is imparted to us a something altogether foreign to our corrupt nature, a divine principle is dropped into the soul which can neither be corrupted nor made to die, and by this means the law is written on the heart. I do not pretend to explain the process of regeneration, but for certain it involves a divine life, implanted by the Holy Spirit.

Once more, the Holy Spirit Himself dwells in believers. I pray you; never forget this marvelous doctrine that as truly as ever God dwelt in human flesh in the person of the God-Man Mediator, so truly does the Holy Spirit dwell in the bodies of all redeemed men and women who have been born again. And by the force of that indwelling He keeps the mind forever

permeated with holiness, forever subservient to the will of the Most High.

III. Now we turn for just a minute to think of **THE WRITER**. Who is it that writes the law upon the heart? It is God, Himself. “I will do it,” He says.

Note, first, that *He has a right* to write His law in the heart. He made the heart, it is His tablet, let Him write there whatever He wills. As clay in the hands of the potter, so are we in His hands.

Note, next, that *He alone can write* the law in the heart. It will never be written there by any other hand. The law of God is not to be written in the heart by human power. Alas, how often have I expounded the law of God and the gospel of God, but I have got no further than the ears, only the living God can write in the living heart. This is noble work, angels themselves cannot attain to it. “This is the finger of God.” As God alone can write there and must write there, so He alone shall have the glory of that writing when once it is perfected.

When God writes *He writes perfectly*. You and I make blots and errors, there needs to be a list of itemized errors at the end of every human piece of writing, but when God writes, blots or mistakes are out of the question. No holiness can excel the holiness produced by the Holy Spirit when His inward work is fully completed.

Moreover, *He writes indelibly*. I defy the devil to get a single letter of the law of God out of a man's heart when God has written it there. When the Holy Spirit has come with all the power of His divinity and rested on our nature, and stamped into it the life of holiness, then the devil may come with his black wings and all his unhallowed craftiness, but he can never erase the eternal lines. We bear in our hearts the marks of the Lord God eternal, and we shall bear them eternally. Written rocks bear their inscriptions long, but written hearts bear them

forever and ever. Does not the Lord say, “I will put My fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from Me”? Blessed be God for those immortal principles which forbid the child of God to sin.

IV. I wish to finish by noticing **THE RESULTS** of the law being thus written in the heart. I hope while I have been preaching about it many of you have been saying, “I hope that the law will be written in my heart.” Remember that this is a gift and privilege of the covenant of grace, and not a work of man. Dear friends, if any of you have said, “I do not find anything good in me, therefore I cannot come to Christ,” you talk foolishly. The absence of good is the reason why you should come to Christ to have your needs supplied. “Oh, but if I could write God’s law on my heart I would come to Christ.” Would you? What would you need Christ for? But if the law is not written on your heart, then come to Jesus to have it so written. The new covenant says, “I will put My law in their inward parts, and will write My law in their hearts.” Come then to have the law thus inscribed within. Come just as you are, before a single line has been inscribed. The Lord Jesus loves to prepare His own tablets, and write every letter of His own epistles, come to Him just as you are, that He may do all things for you.

What are the results of the law being written in the hearts of men? Frequently the first result is great sorrow. If I have God’s law written on my heart, then I say to myself, “Ah me, that I should have lived a lawbreaker so long! This blessed law, this lovely law, why I have not even thought of it, or if I have thought of it, it has provoked me to disobedience. Sin revived, and I died when the commandment came.” We wring our hands and cry, “How could we be so wicked as to break so just a law? How could we be so willful as to go against our own interests? Knew we not that a breach of the commandment is

an injury to ourselves?” Thus we are in bitterness as one that is in bitterness for the death of his firstborn. I do not believe God has ever written His law on your hearts if you have not mourned over sin. One of the earliest signs of grace is dew upon the eyes because of sin.

The next effect of it is, there comes upon the man a strong and stern resolve that he will not break that law again, but will keep it with all his might. He cries out with David, “I have sworn and I will perform it, that I will keep Your righteous judgments.” His whole heart says, when reading the precepts of the Lord—“Yes, that is what I ought to be, that is what I wish to be, and that is what I will be, according to the will of God.”

That strong resolve soon leads to a fierce conflict, for another law lifts up its head, a law in our members, and that other law, cries, “Not so quick there, your new law which has come into your soul to rule you shall not be obeyed, I will be master.” He who is born within us to be our king finds the old Herod ready to slay the young child. The lust of the eye, and the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, each one of these swears warfare against the new Monarch and the fresh power that is come into the heart. Some of you know what this struggle means. It is a very hard fight with some to keep from actual sin. Have you not when troubled with a quick temper had to put your hand to your mouth to stop yourself from saying what you used to say, but what you never wish to say again? Have you not often gone upstairs to get alone, feeling that you would soon slip if the Lord did not hold you up? How wise to get alone with God and cry to Him for help! How prudent to watch day and night against evil! Certain braggers talk about having got beyond all that. I should be glad to think that there are such brethren, but I should need to keep them in a glass case to show them round, or in an iron safe where

thieves could not get at them. I conceive it to be a snare of the devil to imagine that you are beyond the need of daily watchfulness. For my own part, I have not passed beyond conflict and struggle. I bear testimony that the battle grows sterner every day. Those of God's people with whom I associate, I find fighting and wrestling still. Sometimes I know the devil does not roar, but I am more afraid of him when he is quiet than when he rages. Of the two, I would sooner he would roar, for a roaring devil is better than a sleeping devil. Whenever he gives way he only gives an inch to take a mile, and whenever you begin to say to yourself, "My corruptions are all dead, I have no tendencies to sin now," you are in awful peril. Poor soul, you do not know what you are talking about. God send you to school, and give you a little light, and you will sing another tune, I am sure, before long. These are the incidental results—when the Lord writes the law in the heart, strifes and struggles are common within the man, for holiness strives for the mastery.

But does not something better than this come of the divine heart-writing? Oh, yes. There comes actual obedience. The man not only consents to the law that it is good, but he obeys it, and if there is anything which Christ commands, no matter what it is, the man seeks to do it—not only wishes to do it, but actually does it. And if there is anything that is wrong, he not only wishes to abstain from it, but he does abstain from it. God helping him, he becomes upright, and righteous, and sober, and godly, and loving, and Christ-like, for this it is which the Spirit of God works in him. He would be perfect were it not for the old lusts of the flesh which linger even in the hearts of the regenerate. Now the believer feels intense pleasure in everything that is good. If there is anything right and true in the world, he is on the side of it. If there are defeats to truth, he is defeated, but if truth marches on conquering and to conquer

he conquers, and takes and divides the spoil with joy. Now he is on God's side, now he is on Christ's side, now he is on truth's side, now he is on holiness' side, and a man cannot be that without being a happy man. With all his struggles, and all his weeping, and all his confessions, he is a happy man because he is on the happy side. God is with him, and he is with God, and he must be blessed.

As this proceeds, the man becomes more and more prepared to dwell in heaven. He is changed into God's image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord. Our fitness for heaven is not a thing that will be clapped upon us in the last few minutes of our life, just as we are going to die, but the children of God have a fitness for heaven as soon as ever they are saved, and that fitness grows and increases till they are ripe, and then, like ripe fruit, they drop from the tree and find themselves in the bosom of their Father God. God will never keep a soul out of heaven half a minute after it is fully prepared to go there, and so, when God has fitted us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, we shall enter at once into the joy of our Lord.

My brethren, I feel I have talked feebly and commonplace about one of the most blessed subjects that ever occupied the thoughts of man—how God's law shall be kept, how it shall be honored, how holiness shall come into the world, and we shall no longer be rebellious. Herein let us trust in our Lord Jesus, who is to us the surety of that covenant of which this is one great promise — “I will put My law in their inward parts, and in their hearts will I write it.” God do so to us, for Christ's sake. Amen.

1688 STAND FAST – COL. 1:23

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Evening, August 27, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

Be not moved away from the hope of the gospel. —
Colossians 1:23

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Colossians 1]

I THINK THIS MORNING we showed pretty plainly that many a soul has a great struggle to attain to the hope of the gospel [*See “Despair Denounced and Grace Glorified,” No. 1676*]. Not without hand-to-hand fighting do many hearts lay hold on Christ and eternal life. Conscience often sets up a *chevaux de frise* around the hill of Calvary, and thus cuts off the convinced sinner from approaching his Savior. Doubts and fears, the Black Watch of evil, drive back the coming ones, and worry those who would gladly hide in the Rock of Ages. Satan summons all his hosts to push men back from the cross that they may not come to Christ and live. But, brethren, the battle does not end when by a desperate rush a man has come to Christ. In many it assumes a new form, the enemy now attempts to drag the trembler from his refuge, and eject him from his stronghold. It is difficult to get at the hope of the gospel, but quite as difficult to keep it so as not to be moved away from it. If Satan spends great power in keeping us from the hope, he uses equal force in endeavoring to drag us away

from it, and equal cunning in endeavoring to allure us from it. Hence the apostle tells us not to be moved away from the hope of the gospel. The exhortation is necessary in presence of an imminent danger. Do not think that in the moment when you believe in Christ the conflict is over or you will be bitterly disappointed. It is then that the battle renews itself, and every inch of the road swarms with enemies.

Between here and heaven you will always have to fight more or less, and frequently the severest struggle will be at a time when you are least prepared for it. There may be smooth passages in your career, and you may for a while be like your Savior in the wilderness, of whom it is said, "Then the devil departed from Him, and angels came and ministered unto Him." But you may not therefore cry, "My mountain stands firm, I shall never be moved," for fair weather may not outlast a single day. Do not grow secure, or carnally presumptuous. There is but a short space between one battle and another in this world. It is a series of skirmishes even when it does not assume the form of a pitched battle. He that would win heaven must fight for it. He that would take the new Jerusalem must scale it, and if he has the wits to take Jacob's ladder and set it against the wall and climb up that way, he will win the city. "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force." At this time our subject is not the winning, but the wearing; not the taking, but the holding of the fort. "Be not moved away," you that have come to it, "Be not moved away from the hope of the gospel."

I. First, BE NOT MOVED AWAY FROM THE SUBJECT OF THAT HOPE so as to give up any part of the hope which is revealed to you by the gospel. What is your hope?

First, it is the hope of *full salvation*—the hope that, inasmuch as you have believed in Jesus Christ, you are free from all condemnation at the present moment, and shall be free

from all condemnation in the future as to all your sins. And that, in addition to this, He that takes away the condemnation of sin will also destroy the power of it over you. You have this hope—that being made to love righteousness you shall be enabled to walk in obedience, and “to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.” Your hope is that one day you shall be presented holy, without blame, and unreprouable in the sight of the great Father. You shall one day be presented “without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing,” cleansed from all guilt, and cleansed from all tendency to sin and to corruption, and made like unto the perfect creature of God when first it comes from His hands.

Oh, this is a blessed hope! “He that has this hope in him purifies himself even as Christ is pure.” We hope that we shall be like unto Christ Himself, and that the glory of His holiness shall be our glory, and we shall see His face, and His name shall be in our foreheads, and we shall be without fault before the throne of God. Now, never give that up, never allow a particle of it to be diminished. God means all that He has said, and more rather than less. Let no man debase the currency of heaven or clip the coin of the realm of the Great King. The first part of it—hold to it, that the Lord Jesus Christ has cleansed you from all the guilt and penalty of sin, so that not a speck remains to accuse or condemn you. Hold to it, moreover, that if He has once washed you, you shall not need to wash again in that fountain filled with blood, for “He that is washed needs not except to wash his feet.” And that washing shall be given to him by the condescending hands of Christ. The water shall be a second cure of that which the blood has already cleansed and removed. The blood-washing has removed all guilt, and prevented all possibility that sin shall have dominion over you. Complete forgiveness and full justification are proofs that through your Lord’s endurance of the death penalty you

are no more under the law, but under grace. My soul rejoices tonight in perfect pardon. I will not take off a corner of it, so as to allow that the smallest charge can lie against us. We are complete in Christ. He that believes in Him is justified from all things —

“Here’s pardon for transgressions past,
It matters not how black their cast;
And oh, my soul, with wonder view —
For sins to come here’s pardon too!”

All pardon is provided in the one great sacrifice offered by our bleeding Lord, who has now gone into the heavens to plead the merit of His blood. Never take off a fraction from that other part of full salvation, namely, the possibility and the absolute certainty that every sinful tendency now in your nature shall be utterly destroyed. There shall remain in you no root of bitterness, no scar of evil, no footprint of iniquity. There shall be no tinder in your soul upon which the sparks of temptation can fall, so as to live and make a flame. And when the Prince of this world comes he shall find nothing in you. Then you shall enter into your eternal rest, for God keeps not His ripe wheat in the field, but takes it home when it is once fit to be gathered into the garner. This is your hope through the gospel, be not moved away from it.

In connection with this there is the hope of *final perseverance*. I confess that to me it is one of the most attractive doctrines of God’s word that “the righteous shall hold on his way, and he that has clean hands shall be stronger and stronger.” For I am “confident of this very thing, that He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” “I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of My hands.” “He that

believes in Him is not condemned.” “He that lives and believes in Me shall never die.” There are many assurances to this effect, and if anything definite is taught in Scripture, I am confident that this is among the plainest of such teachings. I beseech you; do not shun this doctrine as though it would lead you into the least presumption if properly understood. Its legitimate effect is the very reverse of carelessness. If it is true that, once enlisted in this army of the Lord, you must and shall fight until you are a conqueror, then there is no temptation to lay down the sword for a while in the hope of taking it up again at a more convenient season. If, as some say, you may be Christ’s soldier today and desert tomorrow, and then be enlisted again—if it is indeed true that a man may be regenerated and then lose the divine life, and upon repentance be re-regenerated and re-re-re-re-regenerated I know not how many times, I am not aware that this novelty is hinted at in my unrevised New Testament. There I read of being “born again,” but not of being born again and again and again and again and again and again—I say I cannot find a trace of this in the Bible.

On the other hand, I find that if the one regeneration fails, which is impossible; there would remain nothing else to be done. God’s best work is broken down, and He will never try it again. He has said, “It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame. For the earth which drinks in the rain that comes oft upon it, and bring forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receives blessings from God; but that which bears thorns and briers is rejected, and is near unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.” You cannot re-salt the salt if it has

once lost its savor. If then, grace does utterly depart, which I believe to be impossible, there remains no hope for such a one. God's supreme effort, according to that theory, has been made and failed. Now, there is nothing for it but that the land which has received the dew of heaven, and brought forth no fruit, is near unto cursing, whose end is to be burned. "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." We have but made the supposition to show you the danger, upon whose brink you stand, and over whose verge you would slide if grace did not prevent. If you indeed believe in Christ Jesus, set this to your seal, that He will keep you to the end. Whatever happens, "I am persuaded that neither things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." For dear life, hold on to the hope of final preservation, for there is a purifying, encouraging, stimulating power about that precious truth. "He keeps the feet of His saints." "Be not moved away from the hope of the gospel."

We have a hope beyond this, for we believe that we shall experience *the resurrection*. Though they fall down and men call them corpses, they are precious in the sight of the Lord, and the grave shall be a refining pot, out of which the pure metal of our purified body shall come forth. At the word of the Lord the dry bones shall live, they shall be clothed with flesh, and skin shall come upon them, if after that fashion the body is to be raised. But if not—if the body is to assume another form, and we are to be made like unto a glory which as yet we cannot comprehend, then we may be sure of this—that we shall so rise that mortality shall put on immortality, and corruption shall give place to incorruption. In any case, our bodies shall rise again. The grace of God secures the bodies as well as the souls

of the saints. Christ bought not the half of a man, but the whole trinity of our manhood is His redeemed inheritance, spirit, soul, and body shall dwell forever with Him, for He has redeemed our undivided manhood. Never give up that hope either concerning yourselves or your friends. Let nothing shake your confidence in the resurrection; let no philosophical explanation fritter it away. No other historical fact is so well attested as the resurrection of Christ, and that is the very cornerstone of our confidence. “For if the dead rise not then is not Christ raised: And if Christ is not raised, your faith is vain; you are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If only in this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept.” Often and often when I am sorely beset with devilish temptations and insinuations as to the eternal hope of my soul and body, I fly to this—Jesus Christ did rise from the dead, and inasmuch as He rose from the dead, He has come back to tell us that there is another world, and that not only our souls but our bodies shall inherit a far more blessed condition than this present one. Hold on to this hope of the gospel, and never let it go —

“The Lord is risen: He lives,
The First-born from the dead,
To Him the Father gives
To be creation’s Head.

O’er all forever reigning,
Of death He holds the keys;
And hell — His might constraining —
Obeys His high decrees.

Flies now the gloom that shaded
The vale of death to me;
The terrors that invaded
Are lost, O Christ, in Thee!

The grave, no more appalling,
Invites me to repose;
Asleep in Jesus falling,
To rise as Jesus rose.”

Then remember, you have the hope of *the second advent*. If Jesus comes before you die, you will meet Him—gladly meet and welcome the Son of God upon this earth. You shall be changed so that you shall be fit to inherit the incorruptible glories of the skies. You shall see your Redeemer when He stands in the latter day upon the earth. As Job said, “In my flesh shall I see God, whom my eyes shall see for myself, and not another.” Have joy then, at every thought of your Master’s coming. Do not put it among dark prophecies or doubtful dreams. It is a clearly revealed truth that Jesus will come again and take His people up to their eternal home, “Therefore comfort one another with these words,” and be not moved away from that hope of the gospel, which lies so sweetly in the second advent of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And once more, we have this hope—that when we have passed through all that concerns time and are in eternity, that shoreless, bottomless sea, there remains for us no fear or dread, but we shall be “*forever with the Lord*.” I notice that certain of those who deny the eternity of future punishment are ready, for the sake of their notion, to pull down the battlements of heaven itself, and to make the joy of saints to be as short as the misery of sinners. I, for one, will not pawn heaven in that fashion, to make sin cheap for the willfully impenitent. Once landed on

that eternal shore, there are no storms to dread or hurricanes to fear for these frail boats of ours. There shall not a wave of trouble roll across our peaceful spirits when once we cast anchor in the “Fair Havens,” in the port of peace forever. Be not dismayed as though there would be an after probation, or a purgatory, or a *limbus patrum*, or any of those pretty places that have filled priests’ pockets so long, and are now being newly vamped and produced by our proud thinkers as an aid to their pretty speculations. We will have no purgatory under any form, it is the larder of priests, and the refuge of heresy-mongers, but there is not a word of it in God’s book. We stand to the text—“So shall we be forever with the Lord.” “The righteous shall go away into life eternal.” There is “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you.” “Him that overcomes will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, which is new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God: and I will write upon him My new name.” “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” “Be not moved away from the hope of the gospel,” as to the objects of that hope.

II. But now, secondly, I charge you, beloved, before God, that you **BE NOT MOVED AWAY FROM THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL AS TO THE GROUND OF THAT HOPE**. And what is the ground of that hope?

The ground of that hope is, first, *the rich, free, sovereign grace of God*, because He has said, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” The Lord claims for Himself the prerogative of

mercy, and as He can exercise it without the violation of His justice through the atoning sacrifice of Christ, we joy and rejoice in the fact that men are not saved because of any natural goodness of disposition, or because of anything that they have done, or ever shall do. The children being not yet born, neither having done good nor evil, the divine decree stood fast fixed in the sovereign will and immutable counsels of Jehovah, and it is a good ground of hope for the very chief of sinners. If He has saved the dying thief—if He has saved the adulterer—if He has saved even the murderer, why should He not save me? He can if He will, and He is exceedingly gracious, infinite in compassion, willing not the deaths of any, but that all should come to repentance. It is in the mercy of our God that all our hopes begin, and the cause of that mercy is itself. The reason of divine love is divine love. Because God is gracious therefore He bestows His grace upon the undeserving and the lost. Be not moved away from this.

The ground of our salvation is, next, *the merit of Christ*—what Christ is—what Christ has done— what Christ has suffered. This is the ground upon which God saves the sons of men. Even Cardinal Bellarmine, the mighty opponent of Luther—perhaps the best opponent that he had, whose eyes saw much of gospel light, once said this, “That albeit good works are necessary unto salvation, yet, inasmuch as no man can be sure that he has performed as many good works as will save him, it is, upon the whole, safest to trust alone in the merits and sufferings of Christ.” Cardinal, the safest way suits me! If that is the best and safest, what better do any of us need? Where is the rest for our soul if the ground of our hope is to be what we are, or what we do, or what we feel? But when we fall back upon the finished work of Jesus Christ, and believe in Him whom God has set forth to be a propitiation for sin, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world—I say, when

we fall back on Him, then we have something solid to rest upon. Our eyes cannot bear to look into eternity so long as we cling in the least degree to human merit. But when it is all put aside, and we look to Him bleeding yonder on the cross, then there is a “peace that passes all understanding,” filling our hearts by Christ Jesus. Brethren, if a man were to live in good works without a single sin for ten thousand years he would be well recompensed for that by half-an-hour of heaven. How, then, can we expect to merit eternal bliss by any works of ours? Ah, no, the hope was vanity. Heaven is too precious a thing to be purchased by anything that we can by any possibility do, but it is not too great to be purchased by the blood of Christ, and when we come to His atonement, our anchor holds abidingly. “Be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.”

Another ground of our hope is this—that *God has solemnly pledged* that “whoever believes in Christ shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life.” If, then, we do really and in very deed believe in Jesus Christ and rest on Him, we cannot perish, for God cannot contradict Himself. Thus it is written, hear it and accept it—“He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” Those of us, then, who trust the Savior and Him only, and have made confession of that trust in His own appointed way, know for sure, that God’s eternal veracity is staked upon our salvation. It is not possible that the Lord should cast away a believer. Is it not written, “The just shall live by faith”? We live because we believe in the ever living One. “He that believes in Him has everlasting life,” Be not moved away from this gospel hope which God who cannot lie has set before us —

“The Covenant of the King of kings
Shall stand forever sure;
Beneath the shadow of His wings
His saints repose secure.”

Another ground of our hope is *the immutability of God*. God changes not, and therefore the sons of Jacob are not consumed. The immutability of Christ also confirms our hope, for He is “the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” The unchanging power of His blood is a tower of strength to our faith —

“Dear dying Lamb, Your precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed church of God
Is saved to sin no more.”

If God is immutable, then those that believe in Him have an immutable hope, be sure that you never cast it away.

But, once again, our hope of the gospel is grounded in *the infallibility of Scripture*. The Papist has an infallible pope, but we have an infallible Bible. If that which is spoken in this Book is not true, neither is our hope sure. If these things are questionable, our confidence is questionable, but if this word of God abides fast forever and ever, though heaven and earth should pass away, then he that believes and builds on this infallible truth may rejoice and stand fast. I beseech you, “be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.”

III. So far I have come with all my heart and soul, and I believe that you, dear friends, the members of this church at any rate, have accompanied me. Now let us consider **HOW WE MAY BE MOVED AWAY FROM THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL** unless grace is given to prevent us.

We may be moved from the hope of the gospel in the following ways, sometimes by *a conceit of ourselves*. You may get off the ground of confidence in free grace to think, “Now I am somebody. Have not I prayed at the prayer meeting? Did not friends say that they were edified by it? Have not I preached a

wonderful sermon? Am I not generous? Have not I given large sums to the church and to the poor? Am I not somebody?” Ah, you and the devil together can make a fine tale about that, and I have no doubt that all he tells you, you will very greedily suck in, for we like to be praised, and though the praise comes from Satan himself, it is welcome to our proud flesh. Well, whenever we get to think we are somebody, we are moved away from the hope of the gospel. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Somebody says, “But I am not one.” Ah, then He did not come to save you! Do you say, “I was a sinner once, but I have grown so perfect that I do not sin now”? Don’t you? Then you are removed from that hope which belongs to those who confess and lament their sins. You unChristianize yourself as soon as you strike your name out of the list of sinners who are saved by the Savior’s grace. You are a sinner and Christ died to save you, but do not be moved away from the hope of the gospel by a vain notion that you are no longer sinful. Christ came not to heal the whole, but those who are sick.

Do not be moved away, on the other hand, by *despondency*. Satan does not mind which way you get off the rock, whether it is by jumping up or by jumping down. It is all the same to him, so long as you leave the rock of your salvation. Many there are that go up in a balloon of conceit, while others are ready to roll down the steeps of despondency and despair. But be not moved away from the hope of the gospel either one way or the other. The least sin ought to make you humble, but the greatest sin ought not to make you despair. If you are even now as big a sinner as any fifty men rolled into one, Christ can save you readily—no, has saved you if you put your trust in Him. But, on the other hand, if you presume that you are not guilty, or despairingly say, “I am guilty, but I dare not believe that He can forgive me,” you are in either case moved away from the hope of the gospel. May eternal mercy keep you hourly penitent and

believing, for repentance and faith walk on either side of a Christian till he enters the pearly gates.

You may be moved away from the hope of the gospel also by *false teaching*. If, for instance, you do not believe Christ to be “Light of light, very God of very God,” you have moved away from our hope, which depends upon His godhead. If you think that the priest can save you, you are moved away from the one only Priest, before whom all other priests must let their censers die out into blackness. He alone can save you. If you listen to any teaching which puts your working or your doing into the place of Christ, you are drinking in error, and you will be removed from the hope of your calling, which is free grace, received by faith, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You can be removed from the hope of your calling by *hoping to live by feelings*. Ah, there are many Christians who get tempted that way! They feel so happy, and that is the reason why they believe that they are saved. That is not the reason why I believe I am saved. I am saved because I trust Christ, and if I were as miserable as misery itself I should be just as truly saved as if I were as happy as heaven itself. It is faith that does it, not feeling. Faith is precious, feeling is fickle. Believing, we stand firm, but by feeling we are tossed about. True feeling follows faith, and as such is valuable, but faith is the root, and the life of the tree lies there, and not in the branches and leaves, which may be taken away, and yet the tree will survive. Some have very joyous feelings, they swim in trances and deliriums, and yet they are all wrong. Rest on Christ, whether it is bright day or dark night with you. Though He slays you, trust in Him—as much trust in Him as if He pressed you to His bosom. Faith must abide, though joy departs. If your feelings are down in the dust—if you feel as though you could not hold up your head or look towards heaven, never mind that, but cling to the promise, feel what you may. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,

who came into the world to save sinners, and good feelings will follow by and by, but just now, your first business is this—“He that believes in Him is not condemned.” “He that believes in Him has everlasting life,” Stand to that hope of the gospel.

Many are moved away from the hope of their calling by a *dazzle of intellect*. They are content simply to believe in Jesus till they meet some fine man, a thinker with a big forehead and a large box which ought to be full of brains. We have not been inside to see what is there, but the preacher talks much of his thought and culture. He tells you that you are behind the age—that a faith which believes God might have done very well for the times of Cromwell and the roundhead Puritans, but that, nowadays, we are far in advance of all that kind of thing. Whenever a brother dazzles you like that, let him dazzle. Let him shine as much as he likes. But, as for you, tell him that he who has once looked the sun in the face is not to be dazzled by a glowworm. Go back to your bank, and dazzle your brother worms, but you cannot dazzle me! A man who once has come to know Christ experientially, and lives by faith upon the Son of God, may, if he likes, read all your essays and reviews, and all the articles in your Quarterlies which ridicule the power of faith whether in living or in dying, and he will say when he has read them all through, “This is all they know about it.” I daresay that if a horse were to write a book he would tell us that roast beef is exceedingly bad food to eat. “Well,” we should say, “that is a very natural opinion for a horse. Let him keep to his oats and his hay.” And when a man says that there is no power in prayer, he shows that he does not know anything about praying. Let him keep to what he knows and hold his tongue about what he does not know. He says that it cannot be so. “Ah,” we say, “But it is so,” and when we have tasted and handled it and known it, there is no dazzling us out of it by a sense of the great man’s superiority of mind. I have often thought that those who

cry up their own learning must have wonderfully little of it, for I have jotted down in my pocketbook that I never saw the Bank of England send its bullion anywhere with a number of bells upon the cart to say, "Here is bullion coming along." But I have noticed that every dustman does that. When I hear the bells ringing so much about "culture," I say to myself, "Dust oh!" If they had real diamonds on board they would hold their tongues about them. At any rate, dust or diamonds, the load in these men's carts is nothing to us; we have a more sure word of testimony to which our experience has set its seal. We have believed in Christ Jesus and found salvation, and by God's grace we will not be moved away from the hope of our calling.

Lastly, be not moved away by *persecution*, or by *sneers*, or by *ridicule*. The persecution of this present day is a small thing compared with what our forefathers suffered. Look at that picture of the amphitheatre, by Dore. All is over. Every seat is empty. The stars, like the eyes of God, are looking down upon the arena. There lie the bodies of the saints, and there are the tigers and the lions prowling over the sanded floor, tearing the carcasses which they have slain. But the painter pictures a vision of angels, descending from over the uttermost parapet of the amphitheatre, they are tenderly watching over those precious bodies, for they have triumphed, and from the mouths of the beasts they have gone to the thrones of the angels. Only hold fast where the saints held fast at the first, "in nothing terrified by your adversaries." No more mind the advance of learning than they dreaded the universality of ignorance. We have to fight with both the ignorance of this world and the wisdom of it, too, "But the foolishness of God is wiser than man, and the weakness of God is stronger than man." How readily the divine wisdom and power shall make an end of learned babblings. Be not moved away from the hope of your calling. "Cast not away your confidence," which has great

recompense of reward. Be like the Grecian youth who took his shield to battle, let it be your glory and your defense. We would say to you what the Spartan mother said to her son, “Come back with your shield, or on it.” Come back with the gospel well strapped upon your arm like a golden shield, or, if you die, may it become your bier, and may you be borne home upon it as a steadfast believer in Christ. But never be moved away from the hope of your calling, for so would your shield be vilely cast away.

III. Lastly, WHY IS IT THAT WE CANNOT BE MOVED AWAY FROM THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL? What would follow if we were?

Well, first, we will not be moved away from the hope of our calling, for *there is nothing better to take its place*. A man would not think of going to Australia if he heard that the wages were less there than here, the expense of living greater, and the people were poorer. “No,” he would say, “I shall not jump out of the frying pan into the fire. I shall certainly stay where I am rather than go farther and fare worse.” Well, we are just of that mind. We do not see how we could improve ourselves. Jonathan Edwards, in one of his treatises, speaks somewhat to this effect, “If any man can prove this form of the gospel to be untrue and a mere dream, the very best thing that he can do is to sit down and weep forever to think that he has disproved the brightest hope that ever shone upon the eyes of men.” And that is so. To have the glorious hope that, believing in Christ, we are saved, is such a blessing and such a joy that nothing can compare with it. Where are the fields that can tempt away the sheep of Christ? Where is the shepherd that can vie with Him? Where is the light that is brighter than this eternal sun? Oh, you tempt us with your rattles like children, but having become men we despise them! What have you to offer of truth, of hope, of

comfort, of joy, equal to what we possess? Let us each one sing our answer to the tempter —

“You only, Sovereign of my heart,
My refuge, my almighty Friend,
And can my soul from You depart,
On whom, alone, my hopes depend?

Let earth's alluring joys combine,
While You are near, in vain they call;
One smile, one blissful smile of Yours,
My dearest Lord, outweighs them all.

Your name, my inmost powers adore,
You are my life, my joy, my care.
Depart from You! 'Tis death — 'tis more,
'Tis endless ruin, deep despair!”

Remember, too, that if we are moved away from the hope of our calling *we shall soon be in bondage*. A man may be as merry as a lark if he believes in Christ for salvation; but let him leave that and before long he will be as dull as an owl. What is there that can give us joy apart from Christ? Are we not bound in chains of doubt when once we leave the way of sovereign grace through believing in Christ? If we are moved away from the hope of our calling we cannot grow. A tree that is frequently moved usually dies, but growth there cannot be, and a man who begins in the spirit, and hopes to be made perfect by the flesh—begins in free grace and then gets to adding on his own works—begins by trusting in Christ and then makes confession to a priest—rests in the precious blood, and then dabbles in sacraments, and hopes to find salvation there. He can never grow in grace. He is tossed about with every oar. Every tide of

doctrine puts him up stream or down stream. He can make no progress. And what good can such a man do? He cannot influence others beneficially, for he teaches one thing today, and another tomorrow. He says that God has saved him, and the next day he doubts it. He says that the atonement is full and free, and tomorrow he says that penance is to be performed. He cannot bless others, he does not himself know the way to blessing.

Besides, if we were moved away from the hope of our calling, what mean, miserable wretches we would be, for we should have *deserted our Savior*. I wonder where I could hide my dishonorable head if I once came here to preach to you salvation by the works of the flesh and not by the grace of God. I hope that you would hiss me from the platform, and I hope that you will so serve everybody that shall succeed me, when I am gone who shall preach to you any other gospel than that you have received. Hold fast with all your might right solemnly to the grand old faith, for if you do not, in rejecting that way of salvation, you reject yourselves. What did Christ die for, if we can be saved in some other way? Why did He pour out His blood if there is a cheaper method to win the skies? Why did He go down into the depths of death-shade, if you can force your way to heaven by your own endeavors without Him? No, no, we will stand fast where we now are, resting only and alone upon Jesus Christ our Savior.

For us to leave the plan of salvation—and with this I close—is something like a soldier entrenched in an impregnable fortress accepting an invitation to come out of it. You remember how the black monarch, who has been so much run after in England, said that our soldiers ought to come out of the entrenchments? They were rats, he said, to hide behind earthworks. If they would only come out, he would destroy them, but our soldiers were wise enough not to venture into

the open until the proper time. So the world, the flesh, the devil, and error say, "Come out! Come out! You talk about an infallible Scripture and an almighty Savior, and a simple faith in Him. Come out and fight us fairly on the level." Yes, but we do not see it, and we shall never attempt it. We are like the little coney, of which Solomon speaks. He hid himself among the rocks, and the sportsman, I have no doubt, said, "Why don't you come out, little coney? Come, and let me be your friend." But the coney, though he was feeble, was wise, and he hid himself in the rock all the more, because a stranger invited him out. Do the same when Satan cries, "Come away and be free. Be a man. Do not be always trusting in authority." "No," you say, "I shall stay where I am." As I was riding along in the south of France one day I saw pair of fine birds overhead. The driver called out in the French tongue, "Eagles!" Yes, and there was a man below with a gun, who was wishful to get a nearer acquaintance with the eagles, but they did not come down to oblige him. He pointed his rifle at them, but his shots did not reach half way, for the royal birds kept above. The higher air is the fit dominion for eagles. Up there is the eagle's playground, where he plays with the callow lightning. Up above the smoke and clouds he dwells. Stay there, eagles! Stay there! If men can get you within range, they mean no good to you. Keep up, Christians. Keep up in the higher element, resting in Jesus Christ, and do not come down to find a perch for yourself among the trees of philosophy.

Whatever we do, let us never leave the way of truth, of peace, of safety. We are going along the king's highway and the thieves on the side of the road say, "Come off the highway. It is so dull and monotonous. Come into the woods, we will show you fair flowers, and ferny dells, and quiet caves. Come; listen to the birds that sing all day and all night too. Come with us." We heed you not, he that travels along the king's highway is

under the king's protection, but he that wanders into the dark mountains and lonesome woods may take care of himself. We shall do as we have done—follow the way that leads from the banishment—the way of trusting in the Savior and in Him, alone.

As you hold to the faith, so may God bless and enrich you. As with simple heart you plod along the road that leads to heaven by the righteousness of the Son of God, may the Lord be with you and comfort you. But if you turn back, woe unto you! A curse will fall upon you in that day of shame and crime!

The Lord keep you that you may keep the faith. Amen.

1689 MOUNT ZION – HEB. 12:22-24

A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Morning, November 5, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

But you are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaks better things than that of Abel. — Hebrews 12:22-24

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Hebrews 12]

THE WHOLE PASSAGE will be considered, but our special central text will be verse twenty-three, “To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.”

Paul is displaying the superiority of the new covenant to the old. He tells us what Israel after the flesh came to at their best in the morning hours of the law, and what the firstborn after the Spirit have come to under the Gospel. He pictures the great assembly of the chosen people round about Mount Sinai, and then His inspired mind describes an infinitely larger and happier gathering, to which all believers have come, around Mount Zion. Not only the Hebrews to whom he was writing, but all the people of God are gathered together in one general

assembly, of which the blessed God is the center. He shows us the joyful difference between the two gatherings, and the feelings and pursuits of those who compose them.

What we shall want this morning is a little careful attention to the deep meaning of the text, and an intensely earnest desire to actually enter into the enjoyment of the privileges which are herein set before us. Our text contains an incalculable wealth of meaning, it is written according to God's riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Surely it was written as with a pen of diamond upon plates of gold set with jewels. May God of His grace lead us fully into it.

We would not only speak of privilege as possible, but would say with Paul, "We are come unto it." As surely as we *are not* come to the terrors of the law, so surely we *are* come to the blessings of the Gospel. Read in verse eighteen, "You are not come," and then in verse twenty-two, "But you are come." We do not only *hear* of Zion and her festivities, but *we are come* to them. We do not merely know the letter of the Gospel, but we are come into the inner and spiritual meaning of it by personal enjoyment. "We are come." I would ring out those words as a sort of musical accompaniment to the truths uttered. All through the sermon let our hearts rejoicingly say, "We are come." "We are come." We have obtained by faith all that which is set before us in the text.

I. First, I want to set out, as I may be able, **A CONTRAST PRESENTED IN THE ENTIRE PASSAGE** which we have read—a contrast between the economy of law and the economy of grace.

Every good thing is enhanced in value by its opposite. Light is all the brighter to eyes which have wept in darkness, food is all the sweeter after you have known hunger, and Zion is all the fairer because of Sinai.

The contrast between free grace and law makes grace appear the more precious to minds that have known the rigor of the commandment. The contrast presented here is sevenfold. It may be that the idea of this sevenfold contrast first occurred to Bengel, that prince of critics, but I have ventured to differ from his form of it, and I hope that in so doing I have set forth the contrast as to the seven things more clearly than he has done, so that even the humblest here will catch each point, and retain each contrast in his memory. Notice the contrasts.

First, as to *place* (v. 18), “You are not come unto the mount that might be touched,” (v. 22), “but you are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” Behold Sinai with its rugged crags, scarcely had a human foot ever trodden it, perhaps until that hour in which JEHOVAH descended upon it in splendor it had remained a virgin peak, which the foot of man had never polluted. There was no habitation of man upon it, neither did it yield pasturage for flocks.

The mount of God stood out in terrible sublimity against the sky, holding communion with the stars, but refusing to deal with men. It was sublime, but stern and tempest-beaten. God came upon Sinai with His law, and the dread mount became a type of what the law would be to us. It has given us a grand idea of holiness, but it has not offered us a pathway thereto, nor furnished a weary heart with a resting place, nor supplied a hungry soul with spiritual food.

It can never be the place where congregated multitudes erect a city for themselves, and a temple for the living God, it is not the shrine of fellowship, but the throne of authority and justice. The Jews under the law had that stern hill for their center, and they compassed it about with pale countenances and trembling knees. We gather to quite another center, even unto the palace-crowned steep of Zion. There David dwelt of

old, and there David's Lord revealed Himself. The hill of Zion rose above the city of Jerusalem, and the two together formed the favored spot where JEHOVAH deigned to dwell in solemn state in the midst of His chosen nation, "For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his habitation."

There the service of His sanctuary was carried on, and around it clustered all the palaces of Judah and the habitations of the chosen people. It was called "the city of vision," and the city of peace. God dwelt in the midst of her, and therefore she was not moved. "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion." "God is known in her palaces for a refuge." "God shall help her and that right early." This is a type of the dispensation in which the Lord comes to man in a vision of peace, and manifests Himself in forgiving grace. The Lord dwells with men in the person of the man Christ Jesus, and we come to Him and find our habitation in Him in all generations. Even as the sparrow has found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, so we do come to dwell at the altars of God, in the city which His grace has founded and His power has garrisoned. The places in their contrast are full of teaching.

This mount that might be touched we are told, in the next place, "*burned with fire.*" God's presence made the mountain melt and flow down. "The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail stones and coals of fire." Sinai was altogether on a smoke, innumerable lightnings flashed forth around the summit of the hill, and JEHOVAH revealed himself in flaming fire. What, then, have believers come to instead of fire? Why, to another form of fire, to "an innumerable company of angels" — "He makes his angels spirits, his ministers a flame of fire." Some of those bright beings are called seraphim, or burning ones, for they come and go like flames of fire.

It must have been terrible to look up to Sinai and see it casting forth its flames, but it is with delight that we look towards the angels who excel in strength, and spend that strength in the service of the Lord and His people. These are a wall of fire round about us. “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” Has He not given them charge over us to keep us in all our ways? It is most glorious to think of the position every believer occupies today, for we are all come where the hosts of God encamp about us.

David said, “The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels.” Daniel said, “Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.” The prophet flings his thousands about as if they were mere units. Think of JEHOVAH’S legions. Jesus speaks of the Father sending Him twelve legions of angels in a moment. The Lord JEHOVAH has more legions to send to one spot than the Roman Empire could have mustered in all its length and breadth, and every single warrior of these legions is able to destroy a whole army in a single night, as one of them did when he smote Sennacherib.

What mighty spirits, what flaming spirits, what pure spirits, and what glorious spirits they are, and we have communion with them! We have come to an innumerable company of angels. We do not always realize it as we should, but these loving spirits are about us as surely as they were around Jacob in his dream. If our eyes were opened we should see horses of fire and chariots of fire round about the Lord’s servants. “Millions of spiritual creatures walk this earth, both when we wake and when we sleep.” God comes to us by them, “He rode upon a cherub, and did fly.” Angels contend against evil spirits, and are our defenders. This, then, is our position, we are come to the countless hosts of our Father’s messengers, and not to devouring flame.

Pursue the contrast, and you find on Mount Sinai that there was *blackness*, doubtless made the more intensely black as the vivid lightnings flashed out from it. “You are not come unto blackness,” says Paul. What is the contrast to this? “But you are come to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.” Perhaps you do not for a moment see any contrast, but I will soon show it to you. Blackness is the symbol of sorrow, it is the garb of mourning. Everywhere we associate blackness with grief, but now Paul sets before us the grandest embodiment of joy. The word for general assembly in the original suggests a far-reaching festivity. “You are come to the *paneguris*,” to a solemn festive assembly, comparable to the National Convocation of the Greeks, which was held around the foot of Mount Olympus every four or five years, when all the Greeks of different states came together to keep up the national feeling by festivities and friendly competitions which I will explain further on.

Instead of the colors of grim death we see the joyous congregating of all the clans, the glad union of all the children of God who are scattered abroad. We this day, in loving fellowship with the church, are come to the great gathering of God, the holy convocation of saints of every tongue, the central home of all the tribes of His great family. It is a gathering for solemn purposes, for it is a “church,” but still for joyous purposes, for it is a national holiday. A solemn joy, a holy delight pervades the atmosphere which the one great church of God is breathing.

You say to me, “Do you mean the church in heaven? “Yes, I mean the church in heaven, but on earth too, why divide it? There is only one church. Here and there, earth and heaven make a little division to our senses, but there is no division in the mind of God, He sees one general assembly of all His people, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues.

Cannot you realize the scene and note the glory of it? Cannot your mind come to the general assembly? Cannot you feel that you are standing in company with all the chosen of God of every age, clime, and place, keeping high holiday with them before the Most High, singing with them His praises continually, and doing Him service with delight? I am so glad not to be alone, but to be one of the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, I feel ready to shout for joy! What a contrast this—between the blackness of coming sorrow by the law and the joyous whiteness of the garments of those who believe.

Follow the next point of contrast, and you have *darkness* mentioned, “Nor unto blackness, and darkness.” The cloud on Sinai was so dark as to obscure the day, except that every now and then the lightning flash lit up the scene. What are we come to in contrast to that darkness? “To God the Judge of all.” Possibly it does not strike you with joy when I mention it, but this is perhaps the most joyous of all the clauses of the passage. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” What a contrast to the darkness of the law is a reconciled God!

“Oh, but,” say you, “he is there as the Judge of all, and that makes us tremble,” Why? Wherefore? It makes me leave off trembling when I think that I am come “to God the Judge of all,” that Christ has brought me near, even to the Judge, so that I have nothing to dread from Him. What can the Judge do but pronounce sentence of acquittal upon the man for whom Christ has made expiation? What can He do to harm us? Nothing, but much to help us, for rolling every slander away, He will make the righteous to shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

We are standing today in the presence of that great God who looks upon His people with delight, and awards to them their several crowns. In this great gathering of the firstborn

they wrestle with sin, they run the race of perseverance, they proclaim His honor, and sing His praise. This is, in fact, the highest delight of all the saints—to gather unto their God!

And what follows next? Why, *tempest*. It is said, “You are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest.” All over the top of Sinai there swept fierce winds and terrible tornadoes, for the Lord was there. All heaven seemed convulsed when God did rend it, and descended in majesty upon the sacred mount. But what do you and I see? The very reverse of tempest — “The spirits of just men made perfect,” serenely resting. What more is there for them to do? They are perfect, they have fought the fight, they have run the race, they are crowned, they are full of ecstatic bliss, the light of God is on their brows, the glory of God is reflected from their faces, everything like tempest is far gone from them, they have reached the fair haven, and are tossed with tempest no more.

Today you and I have come where we hold fellowship with the immutably serene, who are resting in the glory which God has appointed them. This is a part of the splendid pageantry of the covenant of grace, and we are come to it.

“E’en now by faith we join our hands
With those that went before;
And greet the blood-besprinkled bands
On the eternal shore.”

Faith has brought us into that one communion, in which all saints live, whether they are on earth or in the Father’s house above.

Follow the contrast further, and you come to *the sound of a trumpet*. This resounded from the top of Sinai. Clarion notes most clear and shrill rang out again and again the high

commands of the thrice-holy God. You are not come to that. Instead of a trumpet, which signifies war and the stern summons of a king, you are come unto “Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant,” and the silver tones of “Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Here is nothing to disturb the ear, for “He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench.”

No message thunders out, “Stand off!” but holy affection cries, “Come, and welcome! for God has come to you in the person of the Mediator, the man Christ Jesus.” In the person of Jesus we see nothing to alarm, but everything to encourage. Oh, for faith to see with joy the Mediator of that new covenant which does not so much command as work in us to will and to do! Is not this one of the choicest blessings of the position we now occupy, that instead of the trumpet we hear the sweet and saving voice of Jesus bidding us repose in His salvation and be eternally blessed?

The seventh contrast lies in this—together with the trumpet there sounded out *a voice*, a voice which was so terrible that they asked that they might not hear it again. They cowered down under it, like poor, frightened children, terrified by the penetrating sound. They could not endure another word, they begged that the voice would be silent. We have come to another voice, the voice of “the blood of sprinkling, that speaks better things than that of Abel.”

There is a voice from Zion; there is a voice that rolls over the heads of the innumerable company of angels, a voice of the Lord that is full of majesty, and exceedingly comfortable to the “general assembly and church of the firstborn,” who know the joyful sound. The blessed Word speaks life, pardon, reconciliation, acceptance, joy, eternal bliss! Happy people, whose ears have discerned this heavenly voice! “They shall walk,

O Lord, in the light of your countenance!” The more of this voice the better—it never wearies the ear, nor distresses the heart—

“Blood has a voice to pierce the skies,
‘Revenge,’ the blood of Abel cries;
But the dear blood of Jesus slain
Speaks peace as loud from every vein.”

We are come to it, for we have been washed in it, and its sweet, prevailing note is filling our heart with music even now.

Now, dear friends, I have set forth the contrast, and I want you to think it out by the help of the ever-blessed Spirit. To all that was transacted at Sinai the people could not come, nor did they wish to come, they kept at a distance, for they were afraid, but to all that is displayed on Zion we may come, nay, what is better, I hope we can say with the apostle, “We are come.” We now enter into it, and delight in it, it has become our life and our joy. All that the people saw at Sinai distressed them, all that we see at Zion electrifies us with delight—we scarcely know how to bear ourselves as we think of the wondrous glory of love. We are not warned off, we are not driven into fear and bondage, but we come unto the mount of God, and there we feast, rejoicing in Him, even in all that He is and does. The veil is torn from the top to the bottom, and we have access to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. There I leave the instructive contrast. May the Holy Spirit bless it.

II. I beg you, in the second place, to follow me in what may not perhaps so much strike you, but it is certainly worthy of your attention, namely, **A COMPARISON IN OUR MORE CENTRAL TEXT.**

Our position is that “We are come to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.” It is

a comparison, not with anything Jewish, for that would not have been suitable, but with a Gentile festival, which more readily lent itself to the apostle's great thought. Let me give you, first of all, a rough sketch.

In Greece, in her happier times, in order to preserve a national unity, the various states, kingdoms, or republics, which constituted Greece proper, held at the foot of Olympus a great gathering, to which none came as participators except citizens of the various Greek nationalities. The object of the gathering was that every part of the Greek nature might be educated and displayed, and the unity of the Greek race be remembered. Poets came and sang verses which they had composed with care, orators stood and discoursed to gain the crown for eloquence, men of all kinds of mental attainments were there emulating each other. At the same time all sorts of athletic exercises for the development of the body were going on.

The territory in which this was held was considered to be sacred. Though the states were often at war with one another, they never carried the war into that particular region. It was a quiet, peaceful, neutral spot. Do you not espy a parallel? No man was allowed to compete in any of the exercises and contests except he had been at least ten months or more in preparation for them. Those who were conquerors had no gold given them as reward, a simple crown of olive leaves was all, but it was thought quite sufficient reward for the most exhausting feats, and for the greatest self-denial, such as resistance unto blood and dislocation of bones.

When the conquerors went home, we are told that they were drawn into their own cities with horses in great state, and the gates were not opened to them, but a breach was made in the city wall that they might be admitted with unusual pomp. The whole business of the paneguris was held in high esteem by the Greek people, and religion lent its rites and ceremonies

to render the gathering the more imposing. The apostle, I do not doubt, had seen it, at any rate, the words which he uses properly and naturally suggest it.

Think for a moment! Before us stands the city which is the center of this unrivalled congregation of the firstborn, Jerusalem stands in her place, and the Acropolis, Mount Zion, looks down upon the scene. To the city of the living God the living children of God have come. See how the presence of the Lord brings together an innumerable company! Far as imagination can fly the space is filled with shining ones, who compose the court of the Most High.

Observe the freeborn burgesses of the holy city, enrolled by God that they may participate in the exercises which make illustrious this noblest of all assemblies. See, yonder are the runners and the wrestlers. Perhaps you do not think there can be much festivity about engagements which involve so much of endurance as running and striving for the mastery, but the Greeks were of another mind, and these contests were a part of the pleasures of the festival. How much I wish that we could look upon all the conflicts, sufferings, and troubles of this mortal life as occupations of the great festive gathering which is now being held in heaven and in earth around the city of our God.

See, yonder is the Judge, the great Umpire of His people's efforts, ready to award the crowns. And who are those sitting in their seats, and looking on? These are they who have taken their turn in these grand displays, and having won their crowns, there they sit, "the spirits of the just made perfect," "the cloud of witnesses." Today, my brethren, you are participating in that great international gathering of all the people of God. Are you not glad to be here?

When I was visiting one of our sick friends he uttered a sentence which stuck to me, and indeed suggested my subject.

He said, "I have had some education for heaven in attending the Tabernacle." "How is that?" "Because I have been used to worshipping with a great company of godly people, used to join in the songs of great multitudes, and I shall feel at home among the number that no man can number." Yes, it is sweet to go up with the multitude who keeps holy day, the number adds a charm to the worship, and gives to our hearts a tone of exhilaration which else they might have lacked. Behold, then, the countless bands of the redeemed assembled around the chosen mount!

Brethren, you are not around a blazing mount, nor do you compose a trembling assembly of persons who, like slaves, are afraid of their great and terrible master, but you are come today to the great festival in which earth and heaven unite. That assembly is one and indivisible. Around the throne of the Most High the apostle represents all the saints as gathered to hold one glorious feast. "Has it begun?" say you. Yes, it is going on now, and you are come to it, if you are living by faith as you ought to live you are now engaged in it. "Oh, but," say you, "I am wrestling." That is a part of the festival. "I never thought of that," cries one. But it is even so.

When the national meeting was held at Olympus there were contests of all kinds, and these were not regarded with sorrow, but with exultation. "What! would you have me look at my sufferings and wrestlings as part of a festival?" Yes, I would have you glory in them, and view them in the same high and heroic light in which the apostle sets them forth, in the figure before us. The exercises are now proceeding. The sacred orators are now doing their part, you heard the singers just now. I count it a high honor to hold your attention while I tell you of the glory of my Lord and Master, who Himself contended here, and endured the cross, despising the shame.

Thousands of others are discoursing as I do, for the assembly abounds in the rich gifts of utterance, and everywhere chosen spokesmen are telling out the wonderful wisdom and love of God. Many at this meeting have hymns to sing, or books to write, and all are doing their best to make the assembly a notable one. Look at another class of chosen men, and mark how they are struggling with temptation, warring against error, running in the course, or bearing heavy weights! Yes, that is all a part of the grand display which the Lord is making before all intelligent beings, wherein the power of love, the energy of faith, the splendor of grace, and the triumph of good are being made manifest to the glory of God by us.

“Oh,” you say, “I cannot look at my sorrows in such a light.” No doubt the men who were wrestling or racing found that for the present it was not joyous, yet they did not shun it, for they had earnestly desired the day when they might be allowed to share in the national display, they counted it a high honor to be permitted to take part even in the roughest contests. None but a Greek could do so. You also have put your name down for a place in the church of God, this is a high honor, to which none but the twice-born, whose names are written in heaven, can be admitted, accept the hardship with the honor.

“Oh, but,” you say, “I have run a long time. I have run for fifty years!” Splendid running this! I do not believe that even at Olympus they ever saw a man run for fifty years at a stretch. Keep on! Do not suffer the glory of the day to fail. You say this sheds a strange light upon Christian life. Say, a blessed light, which will delight the eyes and hearts of enthusiastic believers. The Father of all takes delight in this assembly, it is the joy of Christ to look down upon His champions, whose faith He sustains, whose faith He accepts. He is saying to devils, “Look on, and see what lovers of right can do.” Look on, you innumerable company of angels, and see what grace can do in

the hearts of poor, feeble men and women, making them strong to do exploits.

My brethren, see what feats were performed of old, read the eleventh chapter of this epistle. Remember how the Lord's own elect stood at the stake, and burned to the death without yielding. Think how they were stretched on racks, but would not deny their Lord, were dragged at the heels of wild horses, were roasted over slow fires, or were stung to death by wasps. Their endurance is more glorious than all that can be told of the heroes of Greece. What wonders men have done through grace! God has glorified His name by what He has enabled men to bear and do. This our Lord would have us look at and unite in.

Now, what can we do? God help us to do our best. Oh for grace to suffer more, to give more, to work more, to be more firm in resisting temptation, more pure in all godly conversation! Champions, shall the day of glory decline? The feast has scarce reached its greatest day, let not courage, or patience, or faith begin to flag. May we be jealous for the honor of the chosen race, to which we belong.

Our text adds to the term "general assembly" that of the "*church of the firstborn*." "Oh," say the commentators, "this is tautology." Not so. The apostle felt bound, after having used such a remarkable comparison, to call us back to the solemnity of the matter, and remind us that it is "*a church*" which is gathered. You and I have come to a great church meeting, where all the saints of God are met at this moment. What makes a church? An *ecclesia*?

These words may help you—they are, first, a people *chosen*, next, a people *called*, then a people *culled*, then a people *consecrated*, and then a people *congregated*. So they do become the church of the living God, separated unto God by His electing love, called out from the world by His effectual calling, culled out by being

separated through a work of grace, congregated and gathered together into one in Christ, and evermore consecrated to divine service. This is what you and I have come to. Oh for words with which to speak our joy for admission into such a company!

Brethren, notice that Paul was writing to Hebrews, and the Hebrews no doubt gloried in their great feasts, when all the tribes came up to Jerusalem. Yes, Paul knew all about those feasts, and all that they meant, but this is an assembly to which the Jewish ritual offers us no parallel. Hebrews come to that festival, but it is by no means peculiarly theirs. “They shall come from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south.” Just as at Olympus, Spartans, Thebans, Athenians, and Corinthians, all came, and melted into Greeks, so will they come—Jews, Gentiles, men of this church, and of that, and they will all melt into one general assembly. It is not a peculiar assembly of Hebrews, but a general assembly of all the firstborn.

Note dear friends, the individuals who compose the company. They are all high born, for they are all *firstborn*. There is but one emphatically firstborn, namely, Jesus Christ Himself, the firstborn of every creature, but being one with Him we become the firstborn of God through the new birth. By our union to Christ, and by the blessed processes of grace, we are made and known to be the firstborn of God.

Now the firstborn among men had the ascendancy and sway in the household, even as, “the meek shall inherit the earth.” The day comes when righteousness shall be to the fore. The firstborn had the excellence. “Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power.” The saints are the excellent of the earth, in who is all our delight.

The firstborn were consecrated to God, and we, too, are dedicated persons, set apart unto God, “for you are not your own; you are bought with a price.” The firstborn were

redeemed, so have we been purchased with the precious blood of Christ. The firstborn had the estate, the throne, and the priesthood. Vast is the inheritance of the firstborn of God—all things are theirs, they are heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. To the firstborn belonged honor, “Such honor all the saints have.” There are younger brothers in every family who receive comparatively little if they happen to be descended from great lords, but there are no younger brethren in the family of God. They are all firstborn, all heirs, and what is wonderful to tell, each one of them has all the estate, for so infinite is it that, though if I have all, you can have all too, an innumerable company of this blessed firstborn race can have the whole of God to be their portion forever and ever.

But then it is added that they are *enrolled*. As I have already told you, they enrolled the competitors in the Greek festivals, and a man took care months before to get his name set down for a place. Thus God has enrolled the names of His people. They are written—where? In the earth? No, the wicked are written in the earth, but the names of the Lord’s people are written in heaven. In the divine decree that never changes, in the divine heart that never alters, in the divine memory that never fails, in the divine thought that never forgets, all the names of the godly are written.

I do not know how to set this out, but I want you to feel as if you were standing this morning in that great assembly with spiritual exercises going on around you, such as struggling against sin, striving for the mastery over error, patiently enduring pain, and working holy work. The Judge is looking on, with the crown in His hand, ready to place it upon each conqueror’s head, the air breathes perfume, and is full of music, for all around is joy.

When a man suffers, if he looks upon it as punishment, he feels like a criminal tied up to be lashed, but if he knows that

his pain is a necessary part of the road to victory, he bears it without complaint. If we all understand that this period is not comparable to a battle, of which the result hangs in the balance, but comparable to those deeds of prowess with which of old men celebrated a victory, then the face of things is altered, and our toils are transfigured.

Angels come down, and poor men and women are lifted up, in patience triumphing, and giving pleasure to their Lord, and bringing honor to that favored city which God has prepared for them. We are here amid the throng, not as spectators only, but sharing in the overflowing joy. Oh, the bliss of feeling that even now heaven is begun below, and the sufferings of this present life are but a part of the glory of the Lord manifested in His people!

III. We will conclude by noticing the third point, which is — **A COMING TO BE ENJOYED.**

This is the essence of it all — “*We are come*” unto this general assembly and church of the firstborn. How then do we come? A difficulty meets us at the outset. You that have never thought of this great assembly which my imagination and heart have tried to picture this morning, you cannot come. The porter stands at the barrier, and keeps you back. You cry, “Let me come!” No, you may not come. This festival is only for the firstborn, and you are not that by nature. *You must first be born again*, and become one of the firstborn.

The Spirit of God must make you a new creature in Christ Jesus, and then the porter will open the wicket and say, “Come in, and welcome.” Which part are you going to take in this great gathering? Will you fight against sin? Will you wrestle against error? Will you run for the crown? Will you sing or speak? What will you do in this great congress of all the saints? But these questions do not apply until first you are born from above.

Next, you must be *enrolled*. Your name must be written down, not in our church book, but in the church book of the Lord above. I would to God that some of you would be moved to say, “Oh that my name were written there!” The name of every believer is upon Christ’s heart, and hand, and shoulder. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, if you are trusting in Him, your name is among the enrolled.

If you believe in Him that rose again from the dead, and He is the Author and Finisher of your faith, then come and welcome, you are one of those whose names are written in heaven. The general assembly would miss you if you were absent, yea, heaven itself cannot be perfect if you do not enter its ranks, for all the saints must be there, or else it will not be a perfect gathering. Would you have them mourning in heaven, and saying, “Such a one is not here!” Why, heaven’s songs would be suspended if one child of the family were left in the outer darkness. There must be a believing in Jesus, and then there will be a reception into the chosen assembly.

But you say again, “How am I to get into that assembly? I hope I have been born again, and that my name is written among the Lord’s redeemed people, but I still do not feel as if I were in the festive gathering yet, I feel more like one in the arena contending for very life.” So did many at Olympus. They were fighting and wrestling, and while so engaged they endured great hardships, yet their valiant strife was a part of the grand scene, and they would not have been absent on any account. So, dear friends, what we must do is this, first—God helping us, let us partake in the joy of the one church. Why should I not be as happy as you angels are? They have not so much reason to be happy as I have, for Jesus never took their nature, or died for you.

“Never did angels taste above
Redeeming grace and dying love.”

And you, spirits of the just, why should not I participate in all your joy? What blessing belongs to you which does not also belong to me except the one delight of absolute perfection? Am I not saved? Am I not washed? Am I not clothed? Am I not a child of God — in all things just what you are, except that one finishing stroke — which I am sure to have in due time when I have concluded my wrestling and my running? Let us joy in God today, and surely, even in heaven they know no greater bliss than this. To joy in God through Jesus Christ our Lord is happiness at its highest. May the Spirit of God help us.

If we wish to feel we are among the Lord’s host *let us participate in their service*. There is something for you and for me to do, and to enjoy this holiday we must all take a share in its engagements. Come, brother, quicken your pace, you are not making enough progress in the divine life, hasten your steps, throw away every weight, and cast off the garment which entangles your feet. You, too, dear brother, over there in the workshop, where you hear bad language, and see bad practices—go you in for the wrestling, see what you can do, in the name of the Lord grasp the evil which opposes you, fling an evil custom on its back, and win a victory for purity and truth. Thus shall we each by vying with the rest contribute to the grand result, and share in the general triumph.

And when we are participating in the service, let us next feel that we can *possess the inheritance*. It is “the assembly of the firstborn,” let no man miss his birthright. See how the apostle introduces Esau as a warning, and how he bids us regard our afflictions as chastisements which prove our sonship. Come, then, act as sons, and rejoice in your Father’s riches which are all your own. Let us not remain half-starved through the

poverty of our unbelief, but let us be filled to the brim through the richness of the faith which the Spirit of God has wrought in us.

Let us look on all things round about us with quite a different eye, not walking like slaves who dread their taskmaster, and scarcely dare to call their breath their own, but like free men who have even the Judge of all upon their side, and can have nothing to fear in life or death. Deep be our reverence, but high our joy, as we stand in His gracious presence, and with all the blood-bought rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

At this moment our question is, “Lord, what will you have me to do?” Our cry is — “Here am I; send me.” Use me, my Lord, glorify yourself in me, and while the innumerable company of angels look on, help me to do, and dare, and wrestle, and win, till you shall give to me also the crown of life that fades not away. This will not be a payment of debt, but a gift of grace.

The metaphor of a Greek assembly excludes all notions of wages for work. No mercenary thought entered the mind of a single Greek who strove for the mastery at the assembly. He had nothing to win but a crown of olive. No money was ever given, it would have degraded the paneguris to a common show. Therefore you are not invited to contend that you may win a reward by your own merit. Ours is holiday work which it is joy to perform. Moved by a spiritual chivalry, saints do and dare for Jesus out of love for Him. His service is its own reward. To die for Him is life, to live for Him is heaven. Let others boast their pedigree and nationality; we have reached the august convocation of the ransomed of the Lord who have come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.

1690 CHARIOTS OF IRON – JUDGES 1:19-20

A Sermon
Delivered on Thursday Evening, September 28, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

And the LORD was with Judah; and he drave out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron. And they gave Hebron unto Caleb, as Moses said: and he expelled thence the three sons of Anak. — Judges 1:19-20

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Psalm 78:10-59]

WE FREQUENTLY USE CANAAN as a type of heaven, and the Jordan, through which Israel passed, as a symbol of death. Dr. Watts has taught us to sing —

“Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood
Stand dressed in living green;
So to the Jews old Canaan stood,
While Jordan roll’d between.

Could we but climb where Moses stood,
And view the landscape o’er,
Not Jordan’s stream, nor death’s cold flood,
Should fright us from the shore!”

This is thoroughly poetical, and may be made exceedingly instructive, but it is not quite accurate, if we undertake a careful consideration of the whole matter. If the New Testament is to expound the Old, then there is another lesson to be learned from the land which flowed with milk and honey. “We that have believed do enter into rest,” that is to say, all believers in Christ have crossed the Jordan, and have come into the promised rest. The covenant is fulfilled to them already in a great measure, they are living under Messiah’s sway within the bounds of His kingdom, and every precious thing which God promised them is theirs. They dwell in the “land which the LORD thinks upon,” “Your land, O Immanuel!”

The type, therefore, may best set forth the case of the instructed and advanced believer who has passed through the first or wilderness stage of his life, and has now come into a higher condition, actually enjoying spiritual privileges and sitting together with Christ in the heavenly places. To him, however, this condition of exalted privilege is not a state of undisturbed repose, on the contrary, he wars a constant warfare, wrestling with spiritual wickedness.

The Canaanite is in possession, and the Canaanite is to be driven out. Our natural tendencies and corruptions, our sinful habits and lustings, and the warping and bending of our spirit towards evil—all this has to be overcome, and we shall not possess the land, so as to enjoy undivided tranquility until sin is utterly exterminated. What Joshua could not do our Lord Jesus shall fully accomplish, the enemy within shall be rooted out, and then shall dawn the day of our joy and peace, when we shall sit every man under his own vine and fig tree, and none shall make us afraid. That perfect victory shall be ours, but not yet.

Taking this as the truth which we shall illustrate by our text, we notice that the work of Israel was to drive out and to utterly

exterminate those condemned races which were in possession of Canaan. One tribe was chosen to lead the van in the fierce campaign. Joshua, their heroic leader, was gone, who should lead the way? The power of the Canaanites in his day had been broken, but now that he was dead the old races began to build up again, even as we oftentimes find our sins which we thought were all dead suddenly finding fresh courage, and attempting to set up their empire once more. Then Israel went to God and inquired, “Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them? And the Lord said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand.”

The tribe of Judah, then, was commissioned to lead the way, and we see three things in its conduct of the enterprise. First, *the Lord's power was trusted and magnified*, for “the LORD was with Judah, and Judah drove out the inhabitants of the mountain.” Secondly, by this very tribe, this right royal tribe, *the Lord's power was distrusted, and therefore restrained*, for “Judah could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron.” Yet, as if to rebuke them, they had a singular incident set before them for the vindication of God's power, and of that we read in the twentieth verse. Caleb, that grand old man, who still lived on, the sole survivor of all who came out of Egypt, had obtained Hebron as his portion, and he went up in his old age, when his bones were sore and set, and slew the three sons of Anak, even three mighty giants, and took possession of their city. In this way *the Lord's power was trusted and vindicated* from the slur which Judah had brought upon it.

I. Let us think upon our first head, which is, that by the tribe of Judah **THE LORD'S POWER WAS TRUSTED AND MAGNIFIED**. “The LORD was with Judah.” Oh that the Holy Ghost may be with us!

The people had wisely consulted their God, and it fell to Judah's lot, by divine appointment, to lead the van. In that work the tribe prospered. Read the chapter when you are at home, and you will observe a series of *great victories*. "Judah went up; and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men. And they found Adoni-bezek in Bezek: and they fought against him, and they slew the Canaanites and the Perizzites. But Adonibezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes. And Adoni-bezek said, threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God has requited me."

Thus they overcame the monarch who had domineered over the land, and had been a terror to all the little kings. Next, the tribe attacked Jerusalem, and Hebron, and Debir, and Hormah. Soon afterwards they fell upon the Philistines, who were men of war, and they took Gaza, Askelon, and Ekron with the coasts thereof. The Lord God in this way had proved to Judah, and to all Israel, what He could do, and it would have been wise on their part to have put unlimited trust in Him, then had they gone forward conquering and to conquer.

Has not the Lord done the same with those of us who have believed in Him? What has your experience been, my brothers? I speak not to men of the world, nor to those who have just begun the divine life, but I speak to those of you who have experience of the things of God, and who have lived the life of faith for years. Has not God revealed His power in you? Do you not possess infallible proofs of it which you would scarcely like to tell, for they are as secret as they are sacred? Though you would never mention them in a mixed audience, lest you should cast your pearls where they would not be appreciated, yet they are laid up in your memories in the form of remarkable

deliverances, special comforts, and singular mercies, for which to this day you cannot account upon any other theory than that the Lord God omnipotent put forth His hands and especially helped you in your hour of need. Do not forget these things. If the Lord's power be proved to your own soul by God Himself, then it is proved indeed.

I care very little for those evidences of the existence of a God which are fashioned for us by learned men—the *a priori* argument, the argument from analogy, and all the rest. I have seen an end to them in my own doubts and fears. The most convincing evidence is found in another kind of reasoning, such as that which conquers all doubt by actual experience. When God has come to our soul, and drawn nigh to us in the hour of our distress, we have needed no further argument. When He has said, "Peace," to our troubled spirit, and stilled its raging, then we have received conclusive evidence of His power.

When He has lifted us up into ecstasy, and filled us with joy unspeakable and full of glory, we have laid up these evidences in our record house, and our assurance has grown doubly sure. If we have not tied a bit of red tape round these briefs, and hidden them away in our pigeon holes, we have taken better care of them than that, for we have locked them up in the inner chambers of our heart. Mary pondered these things in her heart, and we have done the same. God's goodness was thus proved to Judah, even as it has been to many of us in our degree, proven as clearly as if it had been worked out mathematically, like a problem in Euclid.

But the Lord had also proved His power to Judah in *numerous victories*. The victories which He gave to them were singular and remarkable, even when not miraculous, and there were many of them. They had gone from city to city, and smitten all their foes. It seemed as if God had said to Judah, as

He said to Joshua, “No man shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life.”

Now, repeated facts go to strengthen the inference drawn from former facts. According to the best practical philosophy, which is the inductive, you note a fact, and then the inference from it is probable, you note another fact, and the inference is more probable. You get six, seven, eight, ten, twenty similar facts, and your deduction becomes more and more nearly certain. But when these facts come thick as hailstones, when they become as many as the drops of dew, or the beams of light, then the inference may be regarded as absolutely sure. When your life is crowded with displays of God's power, with you, for you, and in you, then that power cannot be doubted.

It is impossible to argue a Christian out of the grounds of his faith when he has had long dealings with God. There! You cavilers may boast that you can disprove a doctrine, if you like. I care nothing for your sophisms. You cannot disprove it to me. You can carp against the Old Testament or the New, if you like. I am sorry for you, for it is all clear enough to me, but I am not going to get into a great heat over it in order to combat you. It is not so very important what you prove, or do not prove, about the Books, because the matter of fact still remains untouched.

Those of us who have lived in the light of God's countenance, and have spoken with Him as a man speaks with his friend, and have had replies from Him, not once, nor twice, nor in years gone by alone, but daily and continually, we, I say, are not to be moved from our belief. We have another life into which a stranger can not intrude, and a converse with God which seems ridiculous only to those who never knew it, for it is sublime as sublimity itself, to those who every day enjoy it, and having such a life, it furnishes us with evidence which does not go to be debated, we believe, and are sure.

Disprove our sanity, and you have done something, only let me tell you that even then we shall remain sane enough to hold to what we do hold, and shall not be so mad as to join the infidel ranks. We are satisfied to be fools if to be fools means to see God. We are satisfied to know nothing about the “culture” and the “thought” of this grand century, if that involves being far off from the Eternal Lord, and ceasing to see His hand in nature, in providence and in grace. We are content if we may but know Him, whom to know is eternal life.

Beloved brethren, I may say of many here present that God has proven His power and goodness to you by such overwhelming proofs that doubt, in your case, would be a grievous piece of folly and sin. God had especially favored Judah with remarkable assistance in what I may call, *“brotherly action.”* “Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with you into your lot. So Simeon went with Him.” (See verse 3). In communion with each other these tribes had further proof of God’s power, for He gave them the necks of their enemies.

We also can narrate wonderful displays of God’s power and grace when we have had fellowship one with another in holy service. Our choicest experiences have been enjoyed in Christian society. When the disciples were met together, the doors being shut, then Jesus came into the midst of them, and said unto them, “Peace be unto you.” The Lord is gracious to us when we are having sympathy with His poor and struggling people, and entering into a mutual covenant that we will stand by each other and help each other in the midst of on ungodly world. The Lord is pleased with brotherly love, and there He commands the blessing to rest as the dews on Herman. If I could forget the major part of my own personal experience at

home, yet I can never forget the heavenly seasons spent in the Tabernacle with my beloved ones.

In the prayer meetings, have not our hearts burned within us? At the banqueting table of celestial love, at the Lord's Supper, to which we delight to come every Lord's-day, have we not attained a nether heaven? Have we not passed into the vestibule of God's own house in glory, and felt that it needed scarce the rending of the thinnest piece of tissue to let us actually stand in the unveiled presence of God?

Yes, God has been with us, and then we have had proofs enough of His power and love. When together we have gone forth to battle, to struggle against the sin of the age, to bear testimony for neglected truth, to bring our wandering brethren back, or to reclaim fallen sisters to the faith of Jesus, have we not obtained in that fraternal action grand proofs of the Master's power to bless and save? I know that we have. There let it stand, and let it witness against us if we in the future yield to unbelief.

Yet further, brethren, it so happened that to Judah God gave great proofs of His presence and power by raising up, here and there, a man in their midst who performed *heroic deeds*. I will not speak of Caleb, for you will tell me, "Ah, he was an old, old man, and belonged to another generation. He was just going off the scene, we do not wonder that he did great things." Ay, but he had a nephew, one Othniel, a young man as yet unmarried, and when Caleb said, "He that smites Kirjath-sepher, and takes it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife," His nephew Othniel was the man for the city and the bride.

The young hero stood forward, and went up to the fortress, and took the city, and passed it over to his uncle's hands, and received the promised reward. Oh yes, and we have seen raised up—and shall see it more and more—young heroes who have

been self-denying, self-distrustful, inconsiderate of themselves, who have been willing for Christ's sake to be anything or nothing, and God has been with them, and the power of the Most High has rested upon them. Has not unbelief been rebuked when we have been compelled to say, "Instead of the fathers shall be the children, whom you may make princes in all the earth"? This has been a blessed token of God's presence and power.

I know how it is with those who have been long in the church, they wonder what is to become of it when the old folks die. "When the pastor is gone, what shall we do, then?" Wait till it happens, brothers, wait till it happens, and then you shall see that He who could find one servant can find another. The Lord was never short of instruments yet, and He never will be. You and I, you know, if we wear out one tool, must wait till we send to the shop for a second, but the Lord grows new tools out of old ones. New springs are born out of the decays of the old year's autumn. I have seen a young tree growing out of the roots of the old one and fresh leaves unfold where those of last year had once been.

In our advancing years we become better recruiting sergeants, and so enlist our own successors. You who are now getting grey once wondered what would become of the cause of God when the guide of your youth fell asleep in Jesus, but the immortal cause has survived the death of the standard-bearer. We never hear of that good man now, indeed, he does not seem to have been so important as you thought. God will find messengers as long as He has errands.

When certain of us have gone home, you young people will be leading in our stead, and you will say, "I recollect the old gentleman. We valued his ministry, and we could not think what we should do without him, but we have done a deal better without him than ever we did with him, for God in His infinite

mercy has raised up a worthy successor.” Therefore be of good courage, and let what you have seen as to the past be to you a prophecy of God’s goodness in the future. Caleb shall be gathered to his fathers, but Othniel shall follow him, who shall be as brave as he.

The reason why the men of Judah were successful was because they had *full confidence in God*. Up to a certain point Judah relied upon God. JEHOVAH had bidden them to lead the way, and they led the way. He had conducted them from city to city, and they went, not doubting that God would be with them, and so success attended them, for they leaned upon the Lord. Thus shall it be with us, for it is written — “According to your faith be it unto you.” The Lord will not fall short of the measure, let us not make the measure short.

Yet this is where we too frequently fail, for our faith is such a poor piece of business. We scarcely trust God as well as we trust a generous man, and when God does a great thing for His people they say one to another, “Is it not surprising? Is it not wonderful?” Many are amazed that God should keep His word, so that, when He answers prayer, they exclaim, “What a marvelous thing!” Is it, then, a marvel for God to be true? for God to keep His promise? I grant you that there is a side of it which forever must be marvelous, but still I fear that with the allowable marvel, there is often mixed such a degree of unbelief that the wonderment is not so much of admiring gratitude as astonished unbelief.

For God to hear prayer is as natural as for a cause to produce an effect. There is as much, and as certain, and as infallible a connection between prayer that is wrought in us by the Holy Ghost and the result of that prayer as there is between force in the steam engine and the motion of the train. Instead of the power of prayer being a mere fiction, it is the most practical and certain of all the forces that are extant this side of

the eternal throne. God works more by prayer than by anything else, and if we would but enlarge the channel through which His mighty power would flow, by having more faith and more confidence in prayer, we should see greater things than these.

II. Now I come to the painful but important subject of THE LORD'S POWER RESTRAINED BECAUSE DISTRUSTED.

The men of Judah could drive out the inhabitants of the mountain, but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron. Some of our more flippant infidels have asserted that this verse says that *the Lord* could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, yet the antecedent is not God at all, but Judah. It is Judah that could not drive them out. "Well," say they, "but God was with Judah, and they did drive out the people of the mountain, why could they not drive out the people of the plain by the same power?" This is the hinge of the matter.

They did not conquer the men of the iron chariots, because God in that business was not with them. As far as their faith went, so far God kept touch with them, and they could do anything and everything, but when they despondingly thought that they could not drive out the inhabitants of the wide valleys then they utterly failed. They were afraid because of the chariots, which had poles between the horses armed with lances which cut their way through the crowd, and the axles of the wheels were fitted with great scythes, these inventions were novel, and caused a panic, and therefore the men of Judah lost their faith in God, and so became weak and cowardly. They said, "It is of no use, we cannot meet these terrible machines," and therefore they did not pray, or make an attempt to meet the foe.

They could not drive out the people. Of course they could not. If they had exhibited the same faith about the chariots of iron as about the hill men, the chariots of iron would have been

no better than chariots of straw, for the Lord “breaks the bow, and cuts the spear in sunder, and burns the chariot in the fire.” If they had believed in God, and gone forth in His name, the horses would soon have fled, as indeed they did when God gave His people faith. When Barak led the way with Deborah, then they smote Jabin, who had nine hundred chariots of iron. They fled, they fled, they hastened away, for the Lord was with Barak, and gave them up to him as chaff to the whirlwind. God would have been with Judah if Judah had displayed faith, but having no faith, they could not rout the chariots of iron.

Their faith was imperfect. *They retained too much confidence in themselves*, mark that, for if their confidence had been in God alone, these chariots of iron would have been ciphers in the calculation. If God has to give the victory, then chariots of iron or chariots of fire are no item at all against an omnipotent God. They evidently thought that there was somewhat in themselves, for their power went as far as smiting the men of the hills, but not so far as attacking the cavalry in the open plain where there was room for them to rush to and fro.

Now, that is your weakness and mine. We tacitly imply that God can help us up to a certain point. Does not that mean that we can help ourselves after that point? Being interpreted, the belief conceals a measure of self-trust, and the next akin to self-trust is distrust. If you have passed out of yourself, where have you entered now? Into the infinite. The man who has reached the infinite needs not to reckon any longer. It was of no use for Noah to keep a log of his vessel when there remained no shore, when it was all sea, it did not matter to him where he drifted. And so when you once get right away from self there are no limits. God is unbounded, therefore trust Him without stint. Act like Samson, the strong because the childlike, hero. If there is a Philistine to meet, he is ready for him. There are two of them, he is quite ready for both. There are twenty of them, it

makes no difference. A thousand of them are before him. All right, there are only the more for the hero to kill, for he will slay every mother's son of them, and pile up their carcasses heaps upon heaps. Numbers do not matter. "But, Samson, if you are to do this deed, you must wield a good Damascus blade." "Yes," says he, "if *I* am to do it, of course I must, but if the Lord is to do it, the jawbone of an ass will suffice." It made no difference to him when he had thrown himself simply and nakedly upon God, whether foes were few or many, whether weapons were fit or feeble.

Herein is the failure of our faith, if it rests not in God's bare arm. See this round world, how steadily it turns! how smoothly it moves along in its predestinated course! Why? Because God has hung it upon nothing, and God's own will directs it. Suppose it were hung on a chain, would it be any the more secure? The strength of the chain would come from God, so it is better to have the power without the chain. Though a saint is sustained by nothing but the power of God, all the devils in hell cannot stir him. The bare arm of God is the source of all power.

Next, the imperfection of their faith lay in this, as it may do in yours, my brethren—that *they believed one promise of God and did not believe another*. There is a kind of faith which is strong in one direction, but utter weakness if tried in other ways. It is curious that persons generally pick out the easiest promises to believe, while those which are greater, and therefore are the more godlike, they cannot believe. Judah believed in smiting the hill men, because he thought such warfare easy, but as to overcoming the cavalry with their chariots of iron, that was difficult, and so he did not believe up to that mark. Beware of being pickers and choosers of God's promises.

You who are traders know that customers will turn all your stock over, and keep on picking over packet after packet, and

never buy anything at the end. Does this please you? When people pick the promises over they say—"That one? No, I cannot receive that." When they do believe a promise, it is the smallest in the book. Oh! for a faith that takes the promises in the bulk, and knows nothing of choosing or refusing. Whatsoever God has promised He is able also to perform, and if the promise be but suitable to my case, I am to grasp it and expect to see it fulfilled. Some believe God at one time and not at another. Do you not find that you believe the Lord a good deal on Thursday nights after a sermon? How about Friday night? Ah! that is rather different. I have known friends who are wonderful believers on Sunday. They go home singing —

“Let the earth’s old pillars shake
And all the wheels of nature break;
Our steady souls shall fear no more
Than solid rocks when billows roar.”

You make a bad debt on Monday, how do you feel about it? Not quite so much like a pillar, I daresay, but rather more like the thistledown that is blown with the wind. Much faith is temporary. It is not unlike the faith mentioned in Aesop’s fable when the stag stood looking into the water at his branching antlers, and tossing his head with defiance. “Why,” said he, “am I afraid of the hounds? A dog, come near me? Impossible! If the hound does but see my horns he will fear death. I shall rip him up or dash him to pieces. I will let the pack see what I am made of.” Just then there was heard a bark, and away went the stag like lightning, as terrified as ever.

How like us. We appear to be so grandly strong, so quietly believing, yet the first trouble that comes scatters our courage. That is the reason why Judah could not drive out the dwellers

in the plain, he heard the rushing of those chariots of iron, and his heart failed him.

There was a further reason for failure arising out of this imperfection of their faith, they could not conquer the chariots of iron, because, first, *they did not try*. The Hebrew does not say that they *could not* drive them out. What the Hebrew says is that they *did not* drive them out. Some things we cannot do because we never make the attempt. I wish we had among Christian workers the spirit of the Suffolk lad who was brought up in court to be examined by an overbearing lawyer. The lawyer roughly said to him, “Hodge, can you read Greek?” “I don’t know, sir,” said he. “Well, fetch a Greek book,” said the lawyer, and showing the lad a passage he said to him, “Can you read that?” “No.” “Then why did you not say that you could not?” “Because I never say I cannot do a thing till I have tried it.” If that spirit were in Christian people we should achieve great things, but we set down such and such a thing as manifestly beyond our power, and silently, we whisper to ourselves, “therefore beyond God’s power,” and so we leave it alone. No chariots of iron will be driven out if we dare not make the attempt.

Next, I suspect that they did not drive them out because *they were idle*. If cavalry were to be dealt with, Judah must bestir himself. If chariots of iron were to be defeated, they must enter upon an arduous campaign, and so, taking counsel of their fears and their idleness, they said, “Let us not venture on the conflict.” There are many things that Christ’s church is unable to do because it is too lazy. “What,” say you, “Do you call us lazy?” No, brethren, I will not do anything of the sort. If any of you should happen to call yourselves so it will spare me the trouble. I am afraid that I should have to upbraid certain ministers for being indolent in God’s work, and I fear that many others of God’s servants are none too diligent. Idleness refuses to sound

the trumpet for the battle, and the fight never comes on, and therefore the enemy is not driven out.

Then, again, they were not at all anxious to meet the men who manned those chariots, for *they were afraid*. These men of Judah were cowards in the presence of chariots of iron, and what can a coward do? He is great at running away. They say that he “may live to fight another day.” Not he, he will live, but he will not live to fight, depend upon it, any more another day than he does today. His heart is in his heels, and he will show his foeman his back whenever the fight is hot. We must cry mightily to God to deliver us from cowardice, and then we shall accomplish what we now think impossible.

Dear friends, *there was no excuse for this* on the part of Judah, as there is really no excuse for us when we think any part of God's work to be too difficult for us—for, recollect, there was *a special promise* made about this very case. Kindly look at the twentieth chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy, at the first verse, and you will see how the Lord says, “When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses, and chariots, be not afraid of them, for the Lord your God is with you.” If there be a special promise made to meet an emergency, who are we that we should be cast down by the difficulty?

Besides that, they received *a special commission*. Read the second verse of the chapter from which our text is taken—“The Lord said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand.” Iron chariots or no chariots, God had delivered the country into their hand. Besides that, their God had done greater deeds than this, He had divided the Red Sea, and drowned the army of Egypt, He had divided the Jordan into halves and led His people through the river dry shod, and He had made the walls of Jericho to fall flat to the ground. Why then was He distrusted because of those wretched chariots of iron?

Come, then, brothers and sisters, have you got into a cleft stick in the matter of your personal affairs, and are you saying tonight, “I cannot pray about it, I cannot trust God about it”? Is that right? Look your Bibles up, and see whether there be not a promise exactly suited to your singular condition. Look back upon your own experience and see whether God has not done already for you and others of His people a greater thing than your present trial requires. Why will you say that you cannot drive out the chariots of iron? Be of good courage, and go forward. God is able to deliver you, therefore fear not. He will supply your need, be not dismayed.

Perhaps some holy work for God is your difficulty. You have done something already for which you praise God, and now a new work is laid at your door, of which you say, “No, I cannot undertake it, I do not feel at all equal to it.” What! Not if the Almighty Lord has said, “I will be with you”? Do you answer, “I could do almost anything, but not that”? Are you sure, my brother, that you could do almost anything? Do you not think that, if another task were set before you, it would be equally hard to you? If God commands, is it right to reason why, or even to ask a question?

Let us get at the work, my brethren, and the greater the danger, the greater the labor, the greater the difficulty, so much the more fully let us cast ourselves upon our God, and give to Him the glory of the deed when the work is done. You know not what you can do, you are omnipotent if girt about with God’s omnipotence, you are wise if God teaches you, strong if God upholds you. The capacities which lie within a man are greater than he knows, and the capacities with which God can endow a man are greater than he dreams. Therefore forward, in the name of the Most High!

An unconverted person is here who has been thinking of coming to Christ, but he says, “I cannot give up all my sins.

One of them I must retain, all the rest I can leave, but that one is invincible, for it has chariots of iron. I cannot drive it out,” That sin must die, or you will perish by it. Depend upon it, that sin which you would save from slaughter will slaughter you. “But I am in such a strange connection, and there are so many peculiar circumstances about my case.” Yes, I know, peculiar circumstances surround all men that go to hell, but they do not quench the fire for them.

“But, sir, we must live.” Must you? I see no necessity for that in my own case. I know that I must serve God, but whether I live or not is a secondary matter. It is infinitely better that we should die than do wrong. This necessity of living is not quite so clear as people suppose. Why must you live? The martyrs did not. They felt that they must testify for Christ and His truth, and they gloried to die rather than to do anything that was wrong. You will not perhaps be brought to that, but you ought to be ready for it.

Do not be in such a fever about this poor life. Is not the soul better than the body? “Yes, sir, but I cannot explain my difficulty.” No, and do not try. Turn the sin out. That is the only thing to do with it, and the more you love it, the more speedily should you turn it out, for it evidently lies near your heart, where it can do you great mischief. “Well, it is not one of the grosser sins.” No, it is one of those respectable sins which are so hard to get rid of. You must drive it out.

I notice that if anybody picks my pocket it is sure to be a respectable-looking person. If a man is a rogue he is sure to look like an honest man, to lead people to trust him. Sin must be driven out, even though it is a chariot of iron. Certain Christians make up their minds that certain sins must be tolerated in their cases. I know one who has constitutionally a fiery temper, and so, whenever he gets into a towering passion, he cries, “I cannot help it, I am so constituted.” Instead of

weeping before God, and vowing, “I will master this passion, God is omnipotent, and He can make my temper a reasonable one”—instead of that, he says that everything else can be conquered in him, but not this sin, for it is constitutional.

So have I also known persons to be miserly and mean. The grace of God has done everything for them except make them give away a shilling, and they suppose that they are to go to heaven with their covetous nature, as if the Lord would let such people in there. Selfishness is put down by them as being one of the sins that have chariots of iron, which they cannot overcome. “You know that we all have our besetments,” says one. What do you mean by that? Some sin that you often fall into? Do you call that a besetting sin? If I was to walk tonight across Clapham Common, and half-a-dozen men stopped me, I should say that I was beset, but if at an appointed place a party met me regularly, I should not say that I was beset. And so, the sin which a man often indulges in is not his besetting sin, it is his favorite sin, a sin that will be his ruin.

A besetting sin is one which forces itself upon a man, and ere he can be on his guard it seizes him by the throat and throws him down. We must be watchful, so that the next time the temptation comes we may escape from it. Let us make war on the evil, and say, “It is of no use you attacking me, I will attack and overcome *you* by faith in Jesus Christ.” The fact is, brothers and sisters, we must tolerate no sin in ourselves, if we make excuses for it in our brethren, well and good, but let us never make or accept an excuse for ourselves.

Sin in us is ten times worse sin than in others. If an unconverted man sins it is bad enough, but when a man has tasted of the good word of grace, and has leaned his head on Christ’s bosom, and then falls into sin, what excuse can be offered for him? None. Let us weep tears of blood because we thus offend. We will yet vanquish the chariots of iron. We will

throw down the gauntlet tonight, and in the name of God we will destroy them.

III. To close. Let us see **THE LORD'S POWER VINDICATED.**

Just at that time brave old Caleb, leaning on his staff, went up to Hebron. When he was a younger man Moses sent him as a spy, and when he was on that business he happened to come near Hebron, and there he saw three tremendous fellows of the race of the giants, I suppose they were from eight to ten or twelve feet high. He saw them, and those that were with him were afraid. They said, "We were as grasshoppers in their sight." But Caleb was not a bit afraid. He said, "God is not with them, and they will be easily overthrown."

When they came into the land forty years later, Caleb did not ask for his city, but as an unselfish man, he fought to win cities for others. When that was done he said, "Hebron was given to me. I must go and conquer it, and the giants that I saw years ago, I dare say, have not grown much shorter, so I must cut them down." Away he went, and it proved as he had said, in his hale old age, he was able to slay those three sons of Anak, and to take possession of their city.

I could tell you of holy women, sick and infirm, scarcely able to leave their beds, who are doing work which, to some strong Christians, seems too hard to attempt. Have I not seen old men doing for the Lord in their feebleness that which young men have declined? Could I not tell you of some with one talent—certainly no more—who are bringing in a splendid revenue of glory to their Lord and Master, while you fine young fellows with ten talents have wrapped them all in a napkin and hid them in the earth? I wish that I could shame myself, and shame every worker here, into enterprises that would astonish unbelievers. God help us to do that which seems impossible. Let men be provoked to charge us with fanaticism. God bless

the fanaticism which, being translated, means nothing but a true faith in the living God.

May we be helped to trust the Lord as He ought to be trusted, and march on till we drive out all His enemies despite their chariots of iron, that unto God may be glory forever and ever. Amen.

1691 CHRIST'S WORD WITH YOU – MATT. 11:28

**A Sermon
Delivered on Sunday Evening, June 12, 1882,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington**

**“Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and
I will give you rest.” — Matthew 11:28**

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Romans 10]

ONE IS STRUCK with the personality of this text. There are two persons in it, “you” and “Me”—that is to say, the laboring one and the tender Savior who entreats him to come that he may find rest. It is most important, if we wish to see the way of peace clearly, to understand that we must each one come personally to Jesus for rest — “Come unto Me, all *you* that labor,” and that coming on our part must be to a personal Christ. In effect He says, “Come, yourselves, to Me. Come not through sponsors, not through men whom you choose to call your priests, not through the petitions of ministers and teachers, but come yourselves, for yourselves.” Dear hearers, the quarrel is between you and God, and this quarrel can only be made up by your approaching the Lord through a Mediator. It would be folly for you to ask another to come to the Mediator for you, you must trust in Him yourself. Personal faith is indispensable to salvation.

But the personality of Christ is equally clearly brought out in our text. Jesus says, “Come unto *Me*”—“not to anybody else,

but to *Me*.” He does not say, “Come to hear a sermon about Me,” but, “come to Me.” He does not say, “Come to sacraments, which shall teach you something about Me,” but, “come to Me”—to My work and person. You will observe that no one is put between you and Christ. The text is, “Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden”—not to somebody that will stand between you and Me, but “Come to Me at once, and without a go-between.” Come to Jesus directly, even to Jesus Himself. You do need a Mediator between yourselves and God, but you do not need a mediator between yourselves and Jesus. Christ Jesus is the Mediator between you and the Father, but you need no one to stand between you and Christ. To Him we may look at once, with unveiled face, guilty as we are. To Him we may come, just as we are, without anyone to recommend us, or plead for us, or make a bridge for us to Jesus. We are to come distinctly to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whom God has ordained to be the way of access. I shall fail at this in setting forth the gospel if I shall lead anybody to think that he can get salvation by going to a church, or going to a meeting house, or going to a minister, or going into an inquiry-room, or going to a penitent form. No, we are to go nowhere but to Jesus. You, just as you are, are to come to Christ as He is, and the promise is that on your coming to Him, He will give you rest. That is the assurance of Jesus Himself, and there is no deception in it. He will give you rest as surely as you come to Him. What a blessing it will be if those who have no rest in themselves should find rest at once in Jesus while yet this sermon calls them. Why not? I hope many of you, my brothers and sisters, who have found rest already, will be praying while I am preaching that the unresting ones may come at this good hour and find rest in Jesus Christ the Savior.

You see there are two persons. Let everybody else vanish, and let these two be left alone, to transact heavenly business

with each other. *Jesus* says to *you*, “Come to Me.” Your answer to Him, if it is, “Yes, Lord, I come,” shall be the means of bringing peace to your heart from this time forth and forevermore.

I want at this time to set forth the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, who sends this pressing personal invitation to every laboring and heavy laden one in this place. I wish that I knew how to preach. I have tried to do so for thirty years or so, but I am only now beginning to learn the art. Oh, that one knew how to set forth Christ, so that men perceived His beauty, and fell in love with Him at first sight. Oh, Spirit of God, make it so *now*. If men knew the grandeur of His gospel—the joy, the peace, the happiness which comes of being a Christian, they would run to Him, as flies seek after sweet fruit, so would men seek after the Savior, if they did but know that sweeter than honey and the honeycomb is the word of His salvation.

I. I first call your attention to **THE VALUE OF THE GIFT** which in this text is set before weary, laboring men, “Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” *Rest of the heart is worth more than all California*. To be at peace—to be no more tossed up and down in the soul—to be secure, peaceful, joyful, happy, is worth mountains of diamonds. A man’s life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses, many a poor man is vastly happier than the possessor of large estates, for peace comes not with property, but with contentment. The music of peace is not the jingle of gold or silver. Sweeter bells sound in the pardoned heart than ever wealth can ring. The herb called heart’s-ease often grows in tiny gardens, and happy is the man who wears it in his bosom. It is this gift which, for value, outshines the pearls and rubies which deck an Indian queen, which Jesus promises to give to all that come to Him for it. Oh, rare peace which comes from the Prince of peace!

This, if a man gets it, is practically helpful to him in all the affairs of life. I say that, other things being equal, there is nobody so fit to run the race of life as the man who is unloaded of his cares and enjoys peace of mind. The man who is happily restful towards God is the man to fight the battle of life. I have known a man losing money on the market step aside, and getting into a quiet place, breathe a prayer to God, and come back calm and composed, and whereas before, in his distraction, he was ready to make bad bargains, plunge into speculation, and lose terribly, he has come back rested and peaceful, and has been in a fit frame for dealing with his fellow men. I know this, brethren, having many cares resting upon myself, that when I can feel calmly restful and quiet before God, I am a match for anybody, but when once the spirits sink, and depression comes in, then the grasshopper becomes a burden, and a trifle frets the soul. Bring solid rest to the heart, and you have given the man a fulcrum upon which he may rest the lever with which he can lift the heaviest weight, but let him always be tossed up and down, and he has nothing to give him force. When a man is afraid to die, he may well be afraid to live. He who could not look death in the face—yes, that could not look God in the face, is a man who has a latent weakness about him that will rob him of force and courage in the heat of the battle. I commend to you, men and brethren, in this busy London, the precious gift of my text called, “rest,” because it is not only a preparation for the world to come, but for the life that now is. The peace of God will serve both as arms and armor; it is both battle-axe and breastplate. It will be your heart’s comfort and your hands’ strength. It will be good for day and night, for calm and storm. It has a thousand uses, and all of them are essential to spiritual well-being. *This rest is not found anywhere else but in Christ.*

Let me tell you what kind of rest it is, confessing that I now enjoy it and revel in it. It is rest to the man’s entire spiritual

being. *Conscience* troubles us till Jesus speaks it into rest. Conscience looks back and cries, “Things are not right. You were wrong here, wrong there, and wrong altogether, there is no rest for you.” Conscience keeps a diary, and writes with heavy pen a gloomy record, which we read with alarm. “Tremble,” says conscience, “for you will see this record again at the judgment day, and find yourself condemned by it to eat the fruits of your doings.” Men laugh and say they do not believe it, but they do believe it. Deep in their hearts they must believe it, for God has a witness within which blurts out the truth. Conscience perpetually rouses some men, as a watchdog wakes a slumbering householder. “Down, sir,” they say, “Lie down, lie down,” but this watchdog of God in the heart will not always lie down, every now and then it begins to howl horribly, and the man cannot sleep as he needs to sleep. Even if you drug conscience, it will have fits of barking in its sleep. Now, Jesus promises to those who come to Him a peaceful conscience, which He will give through pardoning all the past, through changing the current of the man’s ideas in the present, and through helping him to avoid in the future the faults into which he fell in the days that have now gone by —

“Rest, weary soul!

The penalty is borne, the ransom paid,

For all your sins full satisfaction made.

Strive not to do, yourself, what Christ has done:

Claim the free gift, and make the joy your own.

No more by pangs of guilt and fear distress,

Rest, sweetly rest!”

It is a grand thing to have rest of conscience. But then we have *minds*, and minds are troublous things. In these days of doubt it is not easy for a mind to get an anchorage, and keep it.

Many are searching for something to believe, or at least, they long to be quite sure that it would be the right thing *not* to believe. Minds are tossed about like ships at sea, or birds caught in a fierce gale. My mind was once in that state—drifted, carried along I knew not where, I for a while believed nothing, till at last it came to this—that I thought my own existence might be, after all, a mere thought. Having a practical vein in my character, I sat down and laughed at my own dreams of non-existence, for I felt that I *did* exist. Up from the depths of doubt and unbelief I rose to feel there must be something sure. I cast my soul at Jesus' feet, and I rested, and I am now perfectly content in mind. Thousands of us can say, "We know whom we have believed, and are persuaded that He is able to keep that which we have committed to Him," and therefore we cannot leave the gospel. No new doctrines, no novelties, no skepticisms, no fresh information, can disturb us now, at least they can but breathe a surface-ruffling, all is calm in the soul's deeps. Having found rest of intellect in the doctrine of Jesus, there will we stay till death and heaven, or the Second Advent, solves all riddles.

But then we have *hearts*. I hope we all have hearts, though some are harsh and almost heartless. Men that have great, all-embracing hearts need a rest for their love. What a cause of trouble this heart of ours is, for it often clings to that which is unworthy of it, and we are deceived and disappointed, and heartbreak crushes us. The tempting fruit, like the apple of Sodom, crumbles into ashes in our hand. Here then is rest and remedy for heart palpitations and the anguish of the breast. Let a man love Jesus and he will crave no other love, for this will fill his soul to the brim —

“Him on yonder cross I love;
Nothing else on earth I count dear!”
May He mine forever prove,
Who is now so inwardly near!

Christ fills a man's nature to the brim. The incarnate Son of God once known gives rest of conscience, rest of intellect, and rest of heart. In a word, He brings complete satisfaction to the spirit.

Now, I do not know of any religion that offers perfect rest to the mind except the religion of Jesus Christ. Men go the world over to try and find this pearl of great price, but their quest is in vain. I often talk with religious people who have no idea of being saved now, and finding rest at once, because they do not understand that Christ came to give immediate salvation to those who trust Him. I spoke with one earnest soul a little while ago, and she said, “I have no rest.” I replied, “Have you believed in Jesus Christ?” “She answered, “Yes.” “But,” I asked, “Do you not know that as soon as you believe in Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven you and you are saved?” “I did not grasp that,” she said. Yet that is the gospel—that whoever believes in Jesus is not condemned. He that believes in Him has everlasting life, and is saved the moment he believes—becomes changed from the power of sin and made into a new man, possessing a new life which can never die. This assurance is worth getting hold of, and he that has it, let him hold it fast, and rejoice in it. Yet it is not to be obtained anywhere except from the dear hands that were nailed to the wood. This rest can never come from any lips but those that prayed upon the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” This then, is the gift which is presented by Christ Jesus at this moment to all that labor and are heavy laden, if they will come to Him for it, they shall have rest of soul.

Some in this place are panting for rest. In this great city there must be much trouble, sorrow, unrest, misery, and distraction. When I look on this congregation, I know that I could not bear to hear the tale of sorrow that would be unfolded if each man were to tell his inward anguish. We look cheerful, but many a cheerful face covers a sad heart. The weight of human misery is enough to make the axles of the earth to break. Oh, what a blessing it is that there is One who can lift us up—who can make the poorest to be better than if he were rich, and the sad to be happier than the merry, and the afflicted to be more blest than the prosperous. Jesus is here in our midst with hands loaded with mercy. May He prove His presence among us by giving rest to all those who came in here laboring and laden.

Thus I have spoken upon the value of the gift. Oh, Spirit of God, teach men its value!

II. Bear with me, in the second place, while I speak upon **THE largeness of the Savior's heart.** Oh, that I could stand aside, and that He would come here Himself and utter the words of my text with His own dear lips! "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden."

See the persons whom He invites to come to Him. *None but a man of great soul would keep such company.* If we would be merry, we choose merry company. Some folks I should be glad to be in heaven with, but I could dispense with their company here, for ten minutes with them on earth is enough to make one wretched. Only a generous spirit would say, "Come to Me, all you that are downcast—all you that are desponding—all you that are broken-hearted." Yet that is exactly what the text says. Christ courts the company of the sorrowful, and invites those who are ill at ease to approach Him. What a heart of love He must have! No, He invites *all* such to come. You know two or three that are really cast down are quite enough at a time for

most of us. It happened some months ago, when I was sitting here to see people, that I had four or five cases so sad—so deplorable—in which I could render such little help, that, after trying to pray with them, and encourage them, I said to a friend who was helping me, “I hope the next that comes to me will be cheerful, for I feel my head ache, and my heart too!” I tried as far as I could to enter into these poor people’s troubles till I became troubled myself. Now, the Savior has such a large heart that He does not forbid the sorrowing ones to *come, all of them*. “Come one,” He says, “come all. All of you that labor and are heavy laden may at this hour come to Me.” The love of my Master’s heart is so great, and the sympathy of His nature with man is so deep, that if all should come that ever labored or ever sorrowed, He would not be exhausted by the sympathy, but would still be able to give them rest in Himself. But what a large heart Jesus has that He comes only to do men good, and begins by doing good first to those that need it most. Oh, my lords and ladies, Jesus did not come to win your patronage that you might applaud Him. Oh, you frivolous and high-flying ones, Jesus did not come to win your approval. It would be a small thing to Him for you to think well of Him. But, O you despised and rejected, you oppressed and down-trod, you weary, you worn, you sad, you sick, you desponding, you despairing, the great Physician of souls comes after you, and it is to you He addresses the invitation at this time. “Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Come, such as you, and come all of you.

And He says, *come at once*. He does not say, “Stop till you get your spirits raised, stop till you get some measure of relief,” but come just as you are. There is a notion in some people’s minds that they cannot believe in Christ till they are better. Christ does not need your betterness. Will you only go to the physician when you feel better? Then you are foolish indeed,

for you do not need the physician when you are getting better. The best time to apply to a physician is when you are as bad as you can be, and the time to come to Jesus is when you are so bad that you cannot be worse. You had better come just as you are. He invites you to do so. “Come,” He says, “all you that now labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Stop not to improve yourselves, but come to Him for improvement. If you cannot come *with* a broken heart, come *for* a broken heart. If you cannot come *with* faith, come *for* faith. If you cannot come repenting, come and ask the Lord to give you repentance; come empty-handed, bankrupt, ruined, condemned, and you will find rest. Oh, you that have written out your own sentence, and have said, “I shall perish; there is no pardon for me,” come to Jesus, for—depths of mercy!—there is pardon even for you. Only come to the Savior, and He will give you rest.

He promises this rest to all who come to Him. My Master stakes His credit upon every case that comes to Him. He has already given rest to thousands, to millions, and He promises to each one that comes to Him that He will give rest to him. If there is in this place, if there is in this country, if there is in this universe, a single person who ever did come to Jesus Christ and He did not give him rest, I would like to know of it, because it is my daily habit to declare that Jesus gives rest to all that come to Him, and I do not want to declare a lie! Let us know when Jesus fails. He says, “Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out.” The first one of you that comes, and He casts you out, let us know of it. We will post it up on the Royal Exchange — “A sinner came to Jesus, and He would not receive him.” Woe to the world in that dark day, for the sun of hope will be quenched and the night will miss her stars. Till then we beg you to remember that Jesus has said, “Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out.” Come and test my blessed Lord, and see if He does not accept you. We stake the veracity of Christ, we

stake the truth of the gospel upon the case of everyone in this place who will come to Jesus Christ by faith, and trust Him. Each heavy-laden one must and shall find rest if he will come to Jesus, or else the Redeemer's promise is not true.

Thus I have spoken upon the largeness of our Lord's heart in promising rest to all that come to Him for it.

III. But now, thirdly, and but a moment, let me speak to you about **THE BLESSEDNESS OF HIS POWER**. Our Lord Jesus Christ is able, to give peace to all that labor and are heavy laden. He has not outrun His power in the promise that He has given. *He is conscious that within Himself there resides a power which will be able to give peace to every conscience.*

Notice *there is no reserve* made whatever, no way is left of backing out of the promise. "Come unto Me," He says, "all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." No limiting clause is inserted. Some men will speak what looks to be a very large promise, but a little condition inserted in it narrows it horrible, but there is no condition here. Whoever of woman born that labors and is heavy laden, and will come to Christ, must have rest, and Christ has said it because He can give it. There are desperate cases among the myriads of troubled hearts, but no single one is too far gone for Jesus. You have read the story of John Bunyan in "Grace Abounding." Was there ever a poor wretch that was dragged about by the devil more than poor John was? For five years and more he could not call his soul his own. He did not dare to sleep, because he was afraid he would wake up in hell. And all day long he was troubled, and fretted, and worried with this, and that, and the other. Poor tinker that he was, he first thought this, and then thought that, and as he says, he was "considerably tumbled up and down in his mind." I am sure such a case as that would have been given up by men, but when Jesus took it in hand, John Bunyan found perfect rest, and his blessed

“Pilgrim’s Progress” remains a proof of the joy of heart which the poor tinker found when he came to rest in Christ.

Now, if within these walls there is a case in which poverty combines with sickness and disease, and if that poverty and disease are the result of vice, and if that vice has been carried on for many years, and if the entire man is now depressed and despondent, like one shut up in an iron cage, yet the Lord Jesus can give rest in such a case. It matters not how black or horrible is your condition, if you believe in Jesus you shall be delivered. As far as this trouble of soul is concerned, and as far as the venom of sin in your nature is concerned, you shall be healed. You shall be made pure, though now you are filthy. You shall be restored, though now you are fallen. You shall be started again in life by a power that shall cause you to be born again, so that you shall be as though you were a little child commencing life again, only under happier skies and holier influences. My Lord and Master, has a power to comfort which reaches to the uttermost of human necessity. Some go a long way in sin and doubt, but they cannot rush beyond the uttermost, and therefore they are within the boundaries of grace. Let the wind drive the bird far off the shore, yet, the Lord has a rest for it in another land. Still does Jesus bid us sound the great trumpet, and ring out the notes both clear and shrill—“Come to Me! Come to Me! Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Blessed shall those ears be that hear the sound if their hearts obey it, and come to Jesus, and find rest at once. He is able. He is able to give rest. He is willing to cause joy. Doubt no more.

Jesus *speaks* thus *without reserve* because He is conscious of power, for note this—Jesus Christ is God, and He that made men’s hearts can make them all anew. The God at whose bidding sprang that mighty arch of the blue sky, who, poured out the sea from the hollow of His hands, and named the stars

in their hosts, is able to save unto the uttermost them that come to Him. This blessed God took upon Himself our nature and became man, and being found in fashion as a man He took men's grief and sin upon Him, and went up to the cross loaded with it, and there suffered in our place, to make expiation for our guilt. There is such merit in His precious blood that no sin can ever overpower it. I can see man's sin before me, it towers aloft, defying heaven, it rises like an awful alp shrouded in a tempest of ill. It seems to thread the clouds, to overtop the stars. Oh, mighty mountain, what shall become of you? But, lo! I see Christ's precious blood and merit like an ocean of grace poured forth to cover sin. Comparable to Noah's deluge, the power of the Atonement is revealed till, 20 cubits upward, the tops of the mountains of our sin are covered, and not a speck of them remains, while on the top of the waters rides the ark of everlasting salvation, and all that believe in Jesus are safe, and safe forever. Oh, sinner, Christ is able to cast your sins into the depths of the sea, so that they shall never be mentioned against you anymore forever, and thus He will give you serenest rest. "Come to Me," He says, "and I will give you rest."

I wish I knew how to put this so that it would get into men's hearts. My Master knows that He can save you, for *He had reckoned up every possible case before He spoke so positively*. His prescient eye discerned all men that have ever lived, or that ever shall live, and He perceived you, dear friend, whom nobody else knows. You up in the corner there, whom nobody understands, not even yourself—He understands you, and He is able to give rest to your eccentric mind. He meant this promise to ring down the ages till it reached you. We have nearly completed the nineteenth century, but if ever we should get to the 119th century, His power to give rest will still be the same. Still will He cry—"Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Oh, the vastness of

my Master's power, that in all ages, and all places, to all the children of man, He promises perfect rest of heart if they will but come to Him! Will not *you* come at once and test that power? Oh that the Holy Spirit may incline you to do so!

IV. Now, fourthly, and this is a very important point, I want you to notice **THE SIMPLICITY OF THIS INVITATION**. It only says, "*Come to Me*, come to Me, come to Me, and I will give you rest." The call is, as we say, plain as a walking stick, it has not a fine word in it. What is the way of salvation? If any minister replies, "I should need a week or two to explain it to you," he does not know the way of salvation, because the way of salvation which we need must suit a dying man, an illiterate man, and a guilty man, or else it will be unavailing in many cases. We need a way of grace which will answer all occasions—a mode of salvation suitable to all conditions.

Our Lord Jesus Christ proves how willing He is to save sinners by making the method of grace so easy. He says, "Come to Me." "Well," asks one, "how am I to come?" Come any way. If you can run, come running; if you can walk, come walking; if you can creep, come creeping; if you can only limp, come limping—come any way so long as you come to Jesus. "But what is coming to Him?" asks one. "If He were at York, I would walk to York tonight to get at Him." He is not at York any more than He is here. We are not to come to Him with our persons, or with our legs, and feet, by a visible motion. How, then, can we come to Him? Listen, you friends in the front gallery, how can I come to you, and yet stand here? Why, by thinking about you, knowing about you, and then confiding my thoughts to you, as I am doing now. If you over yonder are a business man, I resolve in my mind that I will commit my affairs into your hands, and in so doing I have mentally come to you. We are to do with our Lord Jesus just what we do with a physician. We are very ill, it is a bad case. We hear that a

certain eminent doctor has great skill in one particular disease, so we go to him at once. Our physical going is not so much required as our mental resort to him, by putting our case into his hands. We say to him, "Sir, here is my afflicted person. I will tell you all about my state as far as I know it. Ask me any questions. I will make a clean breast of all. Whatever you prescribe for me I will take. Whatever regimen you lay down as to diet, I will follow. I place myself entirely in your hands because I have faith in your skill. You cured my mother of this disease, you cured my brother, and I believe you can cure *me*." Such is faith in Christ. A man says, "Jesus, You have died to save men, and You have revealed Yourself as a Savior. I need saving. You have saved a great many like me, I now put myself into Your hands. I will do what You bid me, I will follow any directions You may lay down, I confide myself to You." Now, if this is a genuine surrender, and a hearty confidence, you are already a healed man. Your power to trust Christ is evidence of spiritual sanity. You would not have been able to trust the blessed Jesus if a sound work of restoration had not already commenced in you.

"Oh," says one, "do I understand, then, that if I trust Christ, I may do as I like?" Stop, stop. I never said that. Listen and learn! Here is a ship which cannot get into the haven. The pilot comes on board. The captain says, "Pilot, can you get her into harbor?" "Yes, Captain, I will guarantee it. I will guarantee that I will get the ship into harbor if you leave her with me." The captain goes to the helm, or gives orders as to steering the vessel, and at once the pilot objects that they are not trusting to him. "Yes, I am," says the captain, "and I expect you to get me into harbor, for you promised to do so." "Of course I promised" replies the pilot, "but then it was understood that I should take charge of the ship for the time being." He orders the helm to be changed, and the captain declares that it shall

not be done. Then, cries the pilot, “I cannot get you into the harbor, and I will not pretend to do so. Unless you trust me I can do nothing, and the proof that you trust me is that you obey my orders.” Now, then, trust Jesus, so as to be obedient to Him, and He will pilot you safely. Yield yourself up to follow His example, to imitate His spirit and obey His commands, and you are a saved man. Your ship shall not be driven out to sea while Jesus steers it. But do not go away under the delusion that you have only to say, “I trust Christ,” and that you are saved directly. Nothing of the kind, you must really trust Him—practically trust Him, or there is no hope for you. Give yourself up to Jesus, renounce your old sins, forsake your old habits, live as Christ will enable you to live, and immediately you shall find peace for your soul. You cannot enjoy rest and yet riot in sin. Shall the drunk have rest, and yet drown his soul in his cups? Shall an adulterer have rest, and wallow in his filthiness? Shall a man blaspheme, and have rest? Shall a man be a rogue and a liar, and have rest? Impossible; these things must be given up by coming to Jesus Christ, who will help you to give them up, and make a new man of you, and then you shall receive rest in your soul. Come to Him, then, in spirit and in truth. Oh, that you would come to Him while I am speaking, and find instantaneous rest for your souls!

V. I must not keep you longer, and so I want upon the last point to briefly call your attention to **THE UNSELFISHNESS OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST**, “Come unto Me,” He says, “and I will *give* you.” That is the gospel. “*I will give you.*” You say, “Lord, I cannot give You anything.” He does not want anything. Come to Jesus, and He says, “*I will give you.*” Not what you give to God, but what He gives to you, will be your salvation. “*I will give you,*” that is the gospel in four words. Will you come and have it? It lies open before you. Jesus needs nothing from you. Suppose you were to become Christ’s

disciple, and serve Him with all your might throughout your life—in what way would that enrich *Him*? He has died for you. How can you ever pay Him for that? He lives in heaven to plead for you, and He loves you, how can you ever reward Him for that? Our hope is not in what we can give to Him, but in what He gives to us. Weak-minded men have taken pleasure in flagellating themselves, starving themselves, shutting themselves up in monasteries, lacerating their bodies, and torturing their minds, to what purpose were these pains? Did the loving Jesus require this of them? Could such miseries afford His tender heart the least pleasure? Not at all, He has no pleasure in human misery, but He desires that His joy may be fulfilled in us that our joy may be full.

I see before me a springhead, from which the clearest crystal water is always leaping with a gladsome sound. A little stream which this spring creates runs down the meadow, you can track it by the long grass, with reeds, and rushes, and tangled wildflowers which drink their life from it. In summer and in winter the crystal fountain never ceases to pour forth its treasures. Come here when you may, you shall see the silver jet spurting forth, and splashing up again from the stones upon which it falls. How musical the sound! Listen! The spring is pleading, quietly but plaintively. It would become a greater blessing if it could but gain the means, and so it sighs and whispers—Buckets! Pitchers! Goblets! Cups! It longs to fill them all. See, here are a couple of pails, but they are empty. Yes, they are all the better for the purpose, full buckets would not help the spring to dispense its water. Here is a cup, but it is a very little one. Never mind, fill it, and bring many like it. This girl has brought a jug, but it is spotted with dirt. We bid her take it away, lest she pollute these sparkling waters. Not so, the spring pleads, and this is its pleading — “Bring it here, I will cleanse it, and then fill it to the brim.” Need I expound the

parable? I hope not. Come and act it out, you little ones or great ones, you empty ones or unclean ones. Thus shall you know more surely and more sweetly than words can tell you how free and full is the grace of our Lord Jesus. The emptier you are the better can you receive from our overflowing Savior. He longs to bless you for your own sake. His yearnings are all unselfish, they are yearnings to give, longings to bestow favor. He cries even now to laboring and laden souls — “Come unto Me, and I will give you not only rest, but all you require.”

Friends, have you learned well the lesson that there is nothing good in yourselves with which to attract Jesus, but all the good is in Him to attract you? Is it not clear enough that physicians do not come to heal healthy persons? I saw a carriage dashing down the street with a doctor in it, and I felt morally certain that he was not coming to my house, for I am in perfect health. I dare say he was hastening to see a poor creature that was on the brink of the grave. When I see the chariots of mercy flashing with winged steeds through the air, I know that they are not speeding to you who are good and righteous, and think you do not need a Savior, but they are hastening to such as are sinful, and crave forgiveness, to such as are guilty and require a change of heart, for these are those that Jesus comes to bless. See, then, how the unselfishness of His character comes out in His inviting to come to Himself those who cannot benefit Him, but must be pensioners on His bounty.

“I will give you rest.” Men, brethren, women, sisters, all of you, this is the final word. The day is coming when we shall all sigh for rest. We need it badly now, and if we have it not we are leading a pitiful life. Those poor rich people in the West End that have no Christ, how can they bear their irksome idleness, the satiety and disgust of unenjoyed abundance? Those poor people in the East End that have no Christ — what

they do without Him I cannot tell. Alas for their poverty and suffering, but what are these to their wretchedness in being Christless? Those of us who have all that heart can wish yet feel that we could never be happy if we were not resting in our dear Savior, how, then, does the starving exist without Him? But we shall soon die, and what then? A young man said to his father some little while ago, "Father, I am prospering in business wonderfully! If I get on at this rate, what will it come to?" "Come to a grave," said his father. And so it will, all things of earth end there. Oh that we were always ready to die, for then we should be ready to live! He that is ready to live tomorrow is ready to die tomorrow. There is no need that death should be a jerk in our existence, life ought to run on as a river pursues its way, and widens into the sea. Our existence here should glide into our existence there, but that cannot be unless we get on the right track while we are here. If we are on the right track now, which is, believing, loving, fearing, serving, and honoring God, we shall go on loving, fearing, and honoring God forever and ever. "Come," says Christ, "Come to Me." What will Jesus say at the judgment day to those who so come? Why, He will say, "Come"—"Come, you blessed of My Father. Keep on coming. Come and inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundations of the world." Ah, my hearers, you will prize this coming when death and eternity are near you.

I am glad to see this great company gathered here, but before I came into this house, I felt much heaviness of heart, and it has not gone from me even now. To stand here and look into familiar faces from Sunday to Sunday is infinitely more pleasant than to look upon so many, the most of whom I have never seen before, for you cause me new anxieties that I may do good to you also. This was my thought, "I shall see them all again at the judgment day and I shall be accountable as to whether I preached the gospel to them with all my heart." I

shall not have to answer for the blood of you all, because there are more Sabbaths than this one, and more opportunities of hearing the gospel than this, and on other Sundays, others preach to you, and these share the burden, or else you waste the holy day, and in that case your blood will be on your own heads. Still, for this one service I must answer to God for you all. If I have not preached Jesus Christ simply and plainly, and from my heart, if I have been cold, and dull, and dreary when speaking upon a theme that might arouse any man to burn and glow with seraphic flame, then I shall be censurable by Him that shall judge the quick and dead. If you think there is nothing in what I have said, reject it. I have no authority to preach it of my own head, for I am no great philosopher. I speak in the name of God, and if you think I do, and believe that God has sent me, then, I beseech you to lay hold of the truth which has been held up before you. The most important thing a man can do is to attend to that which is most important. Your soul is of more importance than your body, and therefore your eternal life ought to secure more attention than your mere temporal existence. A man said the other day that he would die like a dog. Let him, if he likes, but I have no ambition in that direction. I want to live like an angel. If any man is content to be a dog, well, I know not what I can do for him but give him a bone. I did not know that he would care to come here, or I might have sent to the butcher's for fit food. But he that wishes to live forever should, at least, consider where he would live, with whom he would live, and how he can secure happiness in such a life. If there is a God—and that there is a God is written in the very skies—I devoutly desire to have Him for my friend. I think, as I look up to the stars, “I love the God that made those shining worlds. I worship Him, I desire to serve Him, and I wish to be at peace with Him.” And what has made me desire to serve Him and obey Him? Can it be a lie which has done

this? Does a lie make a man love God, and desire to serve Him? No. It is truth, then, that has made me be of obedient heart. The gospel must be true, or it could not thus put men right with their Creator. O my beloved, trust your Savior! Lay hold on Jesus. Oh, may Christ lay hold on you at this good hour, and cause you to enter into His rest. Amen and amen.

1692 “WITHOUT CAREFULNESS” – 1 COR. 7:32

A Sermon
Delivered on a Thursday Evening Lecture,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

I would have you without carefulness. — 1 Corinthians 7:32

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Psalms 23 and 24]

AT THE TIME WHEN PAUL WROTE these words he was giving judgment as to whether it was expedient for Christians in those days to marry. The question was whether they were likely to be better Christians married or unmarried. This was a question of much delicacy, and Paul answered it with remarkable discretion and fidelity. And in so doing he laid down a great general principle, which is of much more value to the church today than Paul's private opinion about the matter of marriage or non-marriage. Paul tells us that concerning virgins he had no commandment of the Lord, but gave his judgment as one that had obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. He did not speak in this case as under divine inspiration, but as an experienced and consecrated man giving his judgment for the good of others, and for the benefit of the great work so dear to him. In that capacity Paul's words are by no means to be despised. I would far rather follow the uninspired advice of Paul than that of any other man. In mental clearness none ever excelled that consecrated man. But he spoke under inspiration beyond all question when he gave this

as his reason for desiring that they would remain unmarried—“I would have you without carefulness,” or as the Revised Version reads it, “I would have you to be free from cares.” This is the mind of the Holy Spirit as well as the mind of the apostle Paul. This is a text, not for Paul’s time alone, but for our time, and for all time.

The general principle in our text I will endeavor to open up before you. We who have believed are the servants of Christ, and are no longer at our own disposal. We are not our own, for we are bought with a price. If you look back in the chapter, at the twenty-third verse, you find a statement to that effect. Hence our business in life is to serve Him who has redeemed us. This one occupation should entirely absorb and engross us. Everything, therefore, which helps us better serve the Lord Jesus better is a good thing, but everything which hampers and hinders us in the main business of our life, though it may be good enough for others, is bad for us. The chief work of the Christian is to glorify God, and to this chief work everything must be subordinated. If a thing is lawful to me, and yet, while lawful, it hinders me in the service of God, it is not expedient, and therefore I am to renounce it. No man ever succeeds in anything who does not give himself wholly to it, it matters not what it is, concentration is essential to perfection in any pursuit. He who would be eminent in any one direction must forego a great many other things which are perfectly allowable. These he must renounce for the sake of his one objective. He will not succeed unless he sacrifices all other things for the one chief thing. So must it be with the Christian. The rule of his life is to be, “This I will not do, this I will not enjoy, this I will not allow to myself, because I could not serve God as well with it, and my business is to keep myself in the best possible form for doing my Master’s work.” We are to labor as much as ever we

can for our Lord, and all other results of life must be to us as chaff to the wheat.

It is with us, Paul tells us, as with a soldier. A soldier is a man who must not open shop, or become a banker or a farmer. He must not think of settling quietly in the town where for a while he is lodging. Why not? The reason is clear, even if there is no war at the present time, yet no man that wars entangles himself with the things of this life if he would please him who has called him to be a soldier. Soldiering requires the man to be altogether a soldier, and it cannot afford to let him be a tradesman or a farmer. He must not hamper himself with that which would hold him to the spot, and prevent his hastening to the field. The nation needs its army to be ready for any and every emergency, so that when the trumpet blows, the regiment marches, the troopship steams across the sea, and the foe is promptly confronted. It is necessary that the soldier keep himself in marching condition, and the less baggage he has to carry the better. So it is with the Christian. He is to aim at a condition best adapted for his holy warfare. He is not to be satisfied when he has said to himself, "Is this right, or is this wrong?" He is to go further. I hope that many of us have long passed beyond that stage, for we have a judgment and discernment which tell us at once what is right and what is wrong, but we now ask a still higher question—"Will this help me to glorify God, or will it not?" This is the inquiry of the higher life, and a godly man is careful in the answering of it. The best thing is bad if it hinders our vocation. Though the garment were made of silk, bespangled with jewels, and adorned with golden thread, yet must we as racers lay it aside if it would entangle us in our running. Though the burden were a bag of pearls, and every pearl were a king's ransom, yet if we are to run—and none can win but those that run—we must leave that bag of pearls in another's keeping, for our business

is with the crown before us. And we must lay aside every weight, and the vesture of sin which does so easily entangle us, that we may run with patience the race that is set before us.

At this time the apostle says to us—"I would have you without carefulness as to earthly things," and this because he would have us full of carefulness as to heavenly things. He wants us to be free from cares, that all our thought, anxiety, meditation, suggestiveness, inventiveness, and burden-bearing may go towards the service of our divine Lord. We have only a certain measure of mind, and he wants all of it for the Lord Jesus, that we may walk worthy of our high calling. But towards other things he says, "I would have you without carefulness."

How are we to be without carefulness? This must be the work of the Holy Spirit, for He is the Comforter, and the helper of our infirmities, but as far as we are to work with Him the question needs a careful reply. How are we to be without carefulness?

I. I answer, we may hopefully attempt this in the power of God, first, **BY AVOIDING THOSE STATES WHICH INVOLVE CAREFULNESS.** Mark well, it is not given to many to select their place in life. More or less it may be committed to us to turn to the right or to the left on certain occasions, but men and women are thrown into certain conditions in which it may be their duty to abide in their calling, though it may surround them with special difficulties. That calling may be one which ordinarily involves a vast amount of care and anxious thought, and yet they cannot get out of it. They ought not to leap the hedge which the Lord has placed along their way, for if they do they may fall into a ditch on the other side, and muddy their garments, and so make matters worse. By crying to God for help, and trusting in His sure word, they will be able to bear the burden which God has put upon them, and it is their wisdom to do so. Yet there are points in which we are allowed a choice

about the state in which we would place ourselves, and here our text comes in as a rule of action.

Paul, in the case before us, is talking about *the marriage of Christians*, and he bids Christians, in the first place, not to marry, for he says, "I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried cares for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord. But he that is married cares for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife."

Now, observe the condition of affairs which led Paul to give this advice. Times of great persecution were present. Christians were continually being dragged into court, or set before the lions in the amphitheater, or shut up in prison, or put to cruel deaths, in such circumstances few would desire to have families about them. The Christian man who had no wife or child could flee in a moment if it were right to flee. Or when he stood before the bar of Nero, he had not to think within himself, "If I die, I leave a wife and fatherless children." When the single man put on his hat, he housed all his family, and thus he could move this way or that way to preach the gospel, or to escape from persecution, and his moving was no great affair such as would be involved in transporting a family from land to land. Paul wished the church to be like an army which is not encumbered with baggage. The circumstances of the time demanded that they should be unencumbered, like troops upon forced marches. Paul himself carried all his property in a little bit of canvas, and it consisted of half a dozen needles and a reel of thread, with which he made tents wherever he went. He was thus without carefulness. In those hard and desperate times it was the best possible thing that a man could do, or a woman either, to remain single. They were thus in the best condition for flight, or suffering, or service, or death. It was not a time in which they could settle down, and engage in trade or agriculture,

and Paul therefore gives as a recommendation that they had better not then be married.

If we get into such times again we will give the same advice, but we are not certain that we should speak thus today, as a general rule. The circumstances are decidedly different, and we are to follow the great principle rather than the particular instance. I have known brethren who I am sure had a great deal more care before they were married than ever they had afterwards. Poor things that they were, they needed somebody to look after them. I have known cases in which women have had great care and burden in their single state, and have found rest in the house of a husband and it has been upon the whole the best for them in the truest sense. They served God better, and were freer from carefulness in the married state. That is the rule to judge by. But numbers of you never judge at all in this way. Many men and women rush into marriage when they know that it must involve them in all sorts of care and trouble, and deprive them of the possibility of doing anything in the Master's service. It is not for me to offer advice, for it is useless. I am often asked for advice, but I generally find that people have made up their minds long before they come to their minister, and only want him to sanction what they have already settled, and therefore I very seldom give any counsel. Still, I shall lay down the general principle, which every Christian man and woman must accept—"I would have you to be free from cares," You are to put this to the front, that you are not your own, you are bought with a price, and about this matter of marriage, as well as everything else, you are to consult the will of your Lord and Master, and you are to put this as the question, "Shall I glorify God better married or unmarried? May I hope that I shall not so greatly increase my carefulness as to distract myself from serving my Lord? There is something to be said on each side, but may I hope that the balance may be struck so

that I shall really be the better servant of Christ in the marriage state? If so, I may enter upon it, but if not, I am not to gratify myself at my Savior's expense. I may not marry if I should then cease to be as good a servant of Christ as I am now." None of you are too good servants of Christ; I have never met with any that were. We cannot afford to lose anything which we have already, for we are not even now all that we ought to be. No, we must give ourselves whole-heartedly to Christ, and remember the admonition of the text, "I would have you without carefulness."

We have got over that somewhat difficult part of our road which is concerned with marriage. We come to another which is very plain, but needs to be spoken of, namely, the matter of *increased worldly business*. Some forget this advice of the apostle altogether, regarding it as a check upon enterprise; such persons take up a number of businesses, and consequently increase their cares indefinitely. Now, if you can serve God better by having a dozen shops, have a dozen, but I have known persons whom God blessed in one shop, and they lost the blessing when they felt they needed to open two or three. In a moderate business, they obtained a livelihood and all that they could want, and they were able to get out to the house of God, and to have spare hours for the service of God in the Sunday school, and in preaching, or other forms of Christian service. Thus they were in an enviable position for usefulness, and ought to have been pillars in the house of the Lord. But they were not content with so favored a state. Nothing would do for them but they must have shop number two—three—four, and then, of course, they were too busy to go out on week evenings, to lectures, classes, or prayer meetings. When invited to take their part in the Lord's work, they replied—"You see, I cannot get out; you must excuse me, I am so tired." Just so. Of course you must look after business now that you are so

immersed in it, but how did you come to get into such a state of bondage that you cannot get out to the worship or service of God? Is not your excessive toil your own fault? If you have brought yourself into such a condition that you cannot give to God His due, is it an excuse for your not being able to do it? The disability is entirely of your own creation, how can it excuse you?

If this were the time, I could mention persons who were members of this church whose departure from the way of righteousness was owing to a grasping spirit, and that grasping spirit has in certain cases led to a foolish rush after riches, which has ended in poverty and discredit. They had as much as they could have managed, but they wanted more, and more, and more, and to get more they ventured upon ways and methods which were questionable. By and by the means of grace were neglected because they must attend to business. Very soon, for the same reason, they could not get up on Sunday morning, they were so tired, they did not get the shop shut till twelve, and then there was clearing up till half-past one, so they could not get out on a Sunday morning. Worse than that, after a while, they just looked over the ledger a little on Sunday afternoon. Soon the very vitals of godliness were gone, and not long after that, the name to live went also, for the power of godliness had entirely departed from them. "I would have you without carefulness," and therefore to the most enterprising brother I would say—Brother, do not fill your pocket at the expense of your soul. Do what is best for the best part of you and that best part of yourself is the soul which deals with God and eternity. God can prosper you and make you exceedingly happy with a more manageable business, and He can make you miserable if you willfully increase your cares. The Lord Jesus said, "A man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses." Therefore, as I would have you without carefulness,

look well, my dear friend, before you launch out into that new business, or take that off-hand farm, or enter upon that speculative operation. Do not wade into risks so deep that you will be drowned in anxiety. Remember how Napoleon tried to do too much, and did it, and did for himself. Men of large capacity may rule an empire, and yet serve the Lord admirably, but the most of us had better be satisfied with a smaller sphere. At any rate, let us not heap up such a load of our own that we shall not be able to bear the burden which our Master would have us carry for His love's sake. Do not look so cross, good friend, or I shall think that my advice is more necessary to you than it is pleasing. The day may come when this warning will be better understood by you than at this moment.

Some Christian men need to have a touch on the elbow about *public engagements*. For my part, I believe that everything which concerns a man concerns a Christian, and that God never wished His servants to leave the government of this realm to all the place-hunters and unprincipled self-seekers who look for a seat in Parliament. Christian men ought to see to it that right is promoted and justice done. To abandon law-making to the worst of men would be infamous. So with everything which concerns the public welfare, I believe that we are to turn the scale for truth and righteousness, and are not to let the devil have his way, and give corruption and oppression the run of all the parishes in England. But there is a limit to a man's acceptance of public office, and let that limit be watched carefully by all the Lord's children. Let the rule be, first our God and then our fellow men. What if I am a patriot, yet first of all the New Jerusalem is the place of my citizenship. I am a pilgrim and a stranger, and even though I seek the good of these aliens among whom I dwell, I must still keep my eye upon my own native country, towards which I am speeding. A man must not be doing twenty things in public life, and neglecting

the calls of the Lord Christ. If he does this he will have care upon care, and will weary and trouble himself with things of no profit, and he will not care for the things of God as he should. Brethren, “I would have you without carefulness,” you are the servants of God; do not make yourselves the slaves of men.

Here I wish to say another word to some whose *occupations prevent their attendance at the house of God*. I am not going to censure or judge any, but I will say this, whenever I hear of a young man who has an occupation with a moderate salary, who is able to get out to worship, and has the whole Sabbathday to himself, so that he can help in the Sunday school, and perhaps in some week-evening engagements, if I hear that he is offered twice as much money in a place where he must be shut out from worship and service, I hope he will look long before he makes the bargain. If part of the Sabbath must go, and all weeknight privileges must go, I would in most cases say, “My brother, forego the temporal advantage for the sake of the spiritual.” There may be exceptions to rules, and I lay down nothing as a hard and fast rule, but still let this be the general guide in such matters—“I would have you without carefulness.” If it is so that he who has less has less care, let me have less. He who has a moderate income, with small responsibility, is a richer man than he who has twice as much, with twice as much responsibility, and only half as much opportunity of serving his God. For you, Christians, the best place you can have is where you can do most for Jesus, and the worst place you can have is where you are denied Christian privileges. No amount of salary can make up to you the disadvantage of being kept from the assemblies of the saints, or can make up to your soul the loss sustained by excessive labor in the house of bondage. “I would have you without carefulness.”

This bears very hard upon all those *forms of speculation* of which some men are so fond. A man says, “I believe that I can

get rich in a hurry by a certain venture." Do not touch it. You will have no end of care, and it may bring absolute poverty upon you. You have heard of the man who hurried to be rich and was *not* innocent. I am afraid that few are long innocent who hasten to be rich. They clutch at everything on a sudden, and they are apt to include in that clutch a few things which do not belong to them. What devouring care must prey upon those whose trade is as risky as a throw of the dice? When business is mere gambling it ceases to be legitimate. Let speculators take heed of those dangers which necessarily attend all games of chance. I believe that every form of gambling, though it may take a business shape, tends more or less to harden the heart. As for the naked form of play, which risks upon the roll of a ball, it is murder to all the finer feelings of the heart. Nobody but gamblers could have cast the dice, all blood bespattered, at the foot of the cross of our Redeemer. Gambling brings men into a state of heart worse than almost any other form of sin. When a man is willing to risk practically his all on the mere toss of a halfpenny whether goods shall go up or down, he is usually a bad man, and if he is not, he will be so before long, for that kind of thing does serious mischief to the tenderest tissues of the heart. If any Christian man attempts it, what a state of mind will he soon know! Can he pray? Can he meditate? Can he commune with the Lord Jesus? Can he be without carefulness? Where can his trust be? Where his faith in God? When he has practically committed his fortunes to the devil, how can he confide in his God? Gambling and prayer can never go together except in the case of the reprobate. I suppose they are profane enough to unite the two, but therein they blaspheme heaven most detestably. Brethren, abstain from those things which inevitably create undue excitement, anxiety, and suspense. I speak as unto wise men, judge you what I say, I would have you

without carefulness, and therefore I would have you avoid those states which involve it.

II. Secondly, BY KEEPING AWAY FROM THOSE OBJECTS OF PURSUIT WHICH WOULD NATURALLY FOSTER IT, I would have you without carefulness.

When a man makes the gaining of riches the first thing in life, he cannot be without carefulness. Where his treasure is there will his heart be also. There is the carefulness to get, the carefulness to hold, the carefulness to place out at interest, the carefulness to collect dues, and so forth. Yes, and this may be the case even with poor people, who may be as full of greedy care as the millionaire. Thrift is commendable, but covetousness is detestable. Men not only lay by for a rainy day, which is well, but they make saving the main object of their lean and hungry lives, and God's glory and man's needs are alike forgotten. Now, if you live for anything but God—especially if you live to hoard up, with the determination that somehow or other you will be immensely rich, you *must* be full of carefulness. It cannot be helped.

Suppose that you are of a nobler spirit, and you live with the view of gaining honor among men, you will with equal certainty be full of cares. I hope you will not say, "I must be honored. I must have my neighbors think well of me, and I will make a slave, or a fool, or a hypocrite of myself to please them." This resolve is detestable, and if you go into that line you will not be without carefulness, I can tell you, and with all your carefulness you will never succeed. To please everybody is as impossible as to make ice and bake bread at the same moment in one oven. Give up the wretched attempt. Be a man, and be not a mere man-pleaser. How blessedly easy I feel in my work for God! But I owe that ease to the fact that I have no one to please but my Lord. When I preach, the last thing that ever occurs to me is to ask myself whether any of you will like it or

not. It is no wish of mine to give offense, but it has never occurred to me to think whether you will be offended or not. I do not think you would respect me if I made my preaching an occasion for seeking to please you. If it pleases God it will please you, if you are right, and if you are wrong, and it does not please you, well, it never ought to please you. This enables a preacher to give his entire mind to his subject. The opposite feeling would distract him and make him live the life of a toad under a harrow. Go into life in just that kind of spirit. Do everything to please your fellow man if it will do him real good. Never be ungenerous, nor unkind, nor uncourteous, but never live to please the world. No slave is as slavish as the wretch who draws his breath from other people's nostrils, and can only live if he is approved by his neighbors. Scorn such servitude. I would have you without carefulness, and you cannot be without carefulness if you seek to please men.

Many persons are so ambitious to be respectable that they never will be without carefulness. They have a pound coming in but they spend a guinea to be respectable, and so they cannot be without carefulness. I charge you do not care about being what is known in the world as "respectable." Be Christians, whether people respect you or not. That littleness which stamps out everything that is good or brave, in order to put a man into the fashion, is to be the object of our supreme contempt. Do right. Serve God. Live for heaven. Care little about man's esteem. Abhor the pride of life. Live above the world, or you will be eaten up with carefulness, it cannot be helped.

Some persons have a favorite objective in life — not God, but an earthly thing, and these cannot be without carefulness. Dear mother, love your children by all manner of means, but if that little one has become an idol, I am sure you cannot be without carefulness. I have known mothers kill their children

because they did not want them to die. That is to say, they never let the wind blow on them, they kept them in a hat box, screened the blessed air of heaven from them, and so brought them up that they became weak and sickly, thanks to their mothers' indulgent care. Lots of children have suffered a martyrdom from too much nursing, and excessive carefulness has created cause for care. If it is not a child, if it is anything else that becomes the pet and hobby of life, you will soon find that you have plenty of care about it. A horse, a dog, a flower, a painting, may entangle men and women in nets of care. I have seen it and lamented it. The more objects you set your heart upon, the more thorns there are to tear your peace of mind into shreds. I know people, who dread every puff of wind, and every shower of rain, because a yacht might be tossed about, or a garden-party spoiled, such trifles sensible people may be troubled about. "What are we to do, then?" asks one. Why, live for God, live wholly for God. Put everything else into its true place. Children, business, every favorite pursuit—leave them in the hands of God, for until you do this you will be cankered with carefulness of one kind or another, and be incapacitated for the joyful service of the Lord your God.

Thus I have given you two helpful rules, first, avoid the states which involve carefulness, and secondly, avoid the pursuits which involve carefulness. May the Spirit of God help you to carry them out.

III. But now, thirdly, and better still, I would have you without carefulness **BY EXERCISING A CHILD-LIKE FAITH IN THE EVER-BLESSED GOD.**

He sends you troubles and trials, but be without carefulness, first, *by never trying to anticipate them*. Never meet them half-way. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Oh, the strength it gives a man when he learns to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread"! It would be a poor prayer if a man

should cry, "Lord, give me a guarantee of my bread for six months." No, no, the Lord never taught us to ask for that. That forestalling of the demands of the future finds no petition written for it. Our Lord would have us cultivate the feeling that whatever the necessity of the day, whatever the requirement of the day, whatever the trial of the day, we shall take it to God as it comes, and He will then and there meet the case. Commit your way unto the Lord, and then be without carefulness.

I will now tell you something better still. If you can manage to live by the five minutes, that is better than living by the day. I am not tonight, at twenty minutes past eight o'clock, allowed to fret myself about what is likely to happen at ten. I have grace at this time for the present moment, but not for ten o'clock. Why, therefore, should I hurry towards a trouble for which I am not yet prepared? Leave ten o'clock worries till ten o'clock comes. The hour that brings the trial will bring the strength. The hour that tests you, will find God ready at your hand to help you. Live by the day, yes, live by the hour.

The next thing is, if you would be without carefulness, *be quite content with the Lord's will*. Suppose you do not prosper in business as you would like, be content not to do so. Do your best, and leave your prospering in the hands of God. Suppose that after consulting a physician you find that your complaint is not removed? Duly follow all right and wise prescriptions and directions, and then leave your health with God. With regard to those you love, when you have prayed for their restoration and they are not restored, then say still, "Not as I will, but as You will." If you cannot suit your purse to your wishes, bring your wishes to your purse. Higher still, if God does not give you all your desires do the other thing—submit all your desires to God. When your desires and God's decrees agree, all will be well. Whether God gives you your wish or you give up your wish, will make no notable difference. You will be

equally happy so long as your will is God's will, and God's will is your will. And I believe—and I speak experientially—that, when you are racked with pain, if God teaches you to submit—and it is often a hard lesson—you can suffer in every limb, and yet sing in your inmost soul. This is the way to live without carefulness—first, not to meet trouble before it comes, and next, when it does come, to be content, saying, “It is the Lord: let Him do what seems Him good.”

The next thing is to *be quite sure about the love of God*. He cannot make a mistake, and He cannot fail His people. If the worst thing, as it seems to us, should happen, it must be the right thing, because God has sent it. Be sure also that when our needs come, God's supplies will come too. The Lord is bound by His own promise to provide for all the real necessities of those who trust in Him. Oh, that we did thoroughly know God, and did fully believe in Him!—then would our peace be as a river, and our joy like that of birds when the sun is rising. Then should we sing —

“I have no cares, O blessed Lord,
For all my cares are Yours;
I live in triumph, too, for You
Have made Your triumphs mine.”

Another sweet thing would help us to be without care, and that is, fully to *believe in the power of prayer*, and in the fact that God does actually answer it. God will grant His children's desires, and answer their prayers. We constantly meet with instances in which God does most manifestly come to the help of those that walk before Him aright. I personally met this week with a notable case. A dear sister is left a widow, with three children. She wonders what she shall do for the morning's bread. There is none in the house. She thinks to herself that she

formerly kept shop, and that she has a few goods left, a little stained and soiled, but still saleable at a price. She goes into her room, and prays God in her agony of soul to direct her to a customer. To her delight a person asks her whether she kept shop once, at such and such a road. Yes, she is the individual. Such goods as she used to buy at the shop, this person cannot get anywhere else, and she much needs them. Could she tell her where she could get the like? Yes, these are the very goods that she had hoped to sell, and though a little soiled and stained, the inquirer is glad to have them. The very person who wants them has come to buy them before she has crossed the threshold to seek a customer, and she is amazed at the goodness of the Lord. This honest woman is told that it was a mere coincidence, she says that she knows nothing about coincidences, but she blesses the Lord that her needs were supplied for the time, and she means to trust Him for the future. I did not attempt to alter her resolution to rely in the future upon God in time of trouble; on the contrary, I cheered her in it, for I would have her without carefulness. When my grandfather was a young man, before my days, he had a great family and a small income. He had a cow that he kept for his children, and he went to fetch it up from the meadow, and when it was near the house it was taken with "the staggers," and died. My grandmother said, "There, James, what shall we do now through the winter without the cow?" He replied, "My dear, God has provided for us, and He always will, though I do not know how." And with a heavy heart he went to pray and lay his trouble before the Lord. I have heard the dear old man tell how that morning brought a post-letter, with nine pence to pay, and grandmother said, "Troubles never come alone. Here is nine pence to pay for this letter. Shall we take it in?" But when she did take it in, it brought twenty pounds from a society in London, to which the good man had never applied. He could not make out how

they knew of him at all, but the Lord knew, and led them to send the money on the day of his greatest need. These stories are a few out of many that are in my wallet, instances which I have gathered in my pilgrimage. I have seen enough, in my own lifetime, to fill a volume concerning the goodness of the Lord in answer to His children's prayers. When you are as sure that God answers prayer as I am sure of it, then you will realize the meaning of the text, "I would have you without carefulness."

Some people of my acquaintance are full of carefulness. I know a maiden lady who possesses what many poor people would think to be wealth. She has a fixed, regular, and ample income, but she will not spend it because she must first save a certain sum. At first her ambition was to have enough in hand to bury her. Why, she has enough already to bury twenty of her, but she keeps on nipping and scraping still, and whenever you meet her she talks of how little she eats, and how dear everything is. She might live in plenty, and have something for the cause of God, but instead of that she has always an awful story about her expenses. I believe that if she were made into the Empress of China, she would be afraid that there would not be enough tea grown in China for her to drink. She is of such a spirit that she is a burden to herself, and a plague to all who are about her. When you once give way to grumbling and grasping, then you are careful, and careful, and careful, till you become good for nothing in the service of God. Do, I pray you brothers and sisters, try to get rid of this disease, for your fretful carefulness will make you a misery to yourself and to your friends. It will destroy your power to do good, and it will cut off your communion with God, for if you do not trust God, God will not walk with you. I do not care to have a man of my acquaintance who does not believe in me. I cannot bear him if he is always mistrusting me. And so it is with God. He will not commune with you or smile upon you, if you will not trust Him,

but if you will leave everything with Him and believe that your heavenly Father knows best, you shall have many a kind word from His lips, and you shall find what a good, gracious, loving Father He is. Why, you and I ought to be as happy as the birds of the air, and as merry as crickets on the hearth, for what a God we have, which will take care of us both in this life and in the life to come! All things are ours—the gifts of God—the purchase of a Savior's love. Even our troubles are the best troubles in the world. Our cross is a heavy one, but it is the best cross for us. Each man has the cross which best fits him. You could not carry mine, and I could not carry yours half as well as my own. Despite your peculiar trials, you are a happy and a favored man, and God has dealt infinitely better with you than you ever deserved or could have expected. Praise Him, then, and bless His name. Get out of the fidgets, brother, if you can. Get out of the worries, my dear sister. You are a good, dear housewife, and your husband says if he could get a little of the Mary into you, and a little of the Martha out of you, you would be a perfect wife. Is not this a practical suggestion? Let us see whether we cannot, each one, be improved by trying to be without carefulness.

Let us each one give all our thought and care to this one object—how can I please God? How can I avoid sin? How can I be holy? How can I win sinners to Christ? How can I comfort my fellow Christians? How, in a word, can I live as Christ would have lived? You never find Jesus worrying. If He weeps, it is for the souls of men; if He suffers, it is to redeem men from going down to the pit; and if He dies of a broken heart, it is a broken heart about the sins of others. As for Himself, what a delicious carelessness of holy confidence there was about Him! He went on board ship, and He knew that a storm would come, a storm that would try the poor little boat, but He lay down and slept. The disciples are all in a worry. They cry,

“Master, we perish!” And where was their Master? Asleep! You have often thought of the sleep of the Savior, and almost deemed Him negligent. Now, think of the grand confidence of the Savior in being able to sleep in a storm. If His disciples had been asleep too, it would have been the best thing they could have done, for they could not manage the winds or the waves. If they had possessed the moral dignity which ennobled their Lord, and had been able to go down into the back part of the boat and to go to sleep with Him, they would have awoken up in the morning in calm. The best thing you, my dear brothers and sisters, can do in a great trouble may be to remember that text, “So He gives His beloved sleep.” Pray over your difficulty, and then go to sleep, and wake up and find it all over, for the Lord has worked a great deliverance for you. I knew one well who was always in trouble about how he should die. Dear good man, he refused to be comforted, but was often troubled about the horrors of the departing hour, until one night he went to bed, shut his eyes on earth, and opened them in glory. He never knew that he was away from earth till he knew that he was in heaven, for he died in his sleep, and so it turned out that he had been worrying himself about nothing. Leave everything with God. If I can trust my *soul* with Him, I am sure I can trust my body with Him. If I can trust my eternal condition with Him, cannot I trust Him with a matter of a five-pound note? What, rest on Christ for glory, and not rest on Christ for bread! Come, come, the Lord get you out of that low, unbelieving state. I am nearly at the close, and so I press upon you my text. Like Paul, “I would have you without carefulness.” May you be so through the power of the gracious God who taught the apostle Peter to say in the Spirit, “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” Amen.

1693 THAT HORRIBLE EAST WIND – COL. 3:15

A Sermon
Delivered on a Thursday Evening
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. — Colossians 3:15

[Scripture Read before Sermon – John 13]

I DO NOT KNOW how it is, but during the last two or three days I have been called to sympathize with an amount of sorrow such as I have seldom met with before in so short a space of time. One messenger of misery has followed on the heels of another, each one with heavy tidings. Nor is that all, for I have also been perplexed with a large amount of sinning, quarrelling, and fault-finding. People are murmuring, grumbling, fretting, and fighting on all sides. So much has this has tried me that I feel little fitted to act as comforter, for I need comfort myself. I have endeavored to cheer others till I have drunk of their cup of sorrow, and put my own mouth out of taste, I have tried to make peace for others till I am half afraid of losing my own, I have answered the people's grumbings till I am tempted to have a growl or two on my own account. Perhaps I may relieve my own mind by the sermon which I hope to deliver.

I said to one whom I greatly esteem, “I do not know how it is, but everybody seems out of sorts with everybody else just now.” His wise answer was, “THE WIND IS IN THE EAST.” This fact accounts for a great deal, for

“When the wind is in the east,
’Tis neither good for man nor beast.”

This is that ill wind which seems to blow no man any good. Some humanities feel the east wind terribly, it sets their teeth on edge, and they feel that they must bite the first person they meet. I am glad to find some sort of excuse for my fellow Christians, and if I can find it nowhere but in the east wind, I will make the best I can of it, but I earnestly hope that the wind may soon blow from another quarter, and not come from the east again till we have had a little respite, and laid in a new stock of patience.

If a cutting wind causes despondency, vexation, discontent, and bad temper, may soft gales visit us frequently, and bring us healing in their wings. As fair weather will not last forever, it will be well to prepare ourselves to breast the blast. It will never do for us to have a religion which can be killed by the wind, we must be made of better stuff than that. Yet this wind is blamed, and I wish therefore that it would take itself off. If I could find a snug corner where the cruel east wind was never felt, I would feel inclined to promote an emigration movement for certain persons whom I will not mention, as for myself, I am afraid that it would not suit me to be altogether screened from the wind, for trials are necessary to one who is called to this ministry.

Troubles and east winds will come to the servants of God, and they are sent to do us good, for perhaps, if we could get our backs against a protecting wall, and sit forever in the

sunshine, with no east wind to interfere with us, we would go to sleep, or waking, we might come to love this world so well as to be loath to leave it. It would be a horrible thing for any one of us if the south wind should softly breathe upon our cheek, and whisper gently in our ears of long continued joy to be found on earth, for then we would be tempted to sit down and say, “Soul, take your ease. You have at last found a place free from the trials of time, therefore eat, drink, and be merry, and let the future world care for itself.”

When I turn over in my mind the events of the last few days I do not suppose that there is more discord or discontent in the world just now than at any other time, but it happens that a number of black lines have all found their center in my person, and my thoughts have had to travel out in all those directions, all which is trying enough, but all the more so when *the wind is in the east*. It is a coincidence, but the like has happened before. I have had to unravel many tangled skeins in my time, out of love to others, I did not get the threads into a ravel, but people are very fond of bringing me their snarls to disentangle, and when I have a hope of succeeding I try my best. Gladly would I be a peacemaker, but it is much easier to make a snarl than to put it straight, again, *especially in the east wind*.

I have tried to set things right, and meanwhile I have asked myself, “Is there not a remedy for these mischiefs?” I feel assured there is such a remedy. Family discomfort, husbands and wives that cannot agree, domestic difficulties, brothers and sisters that fall out, church troubles, members that are not treated kindly by others (not generally the kindest sort of people themselves, I notice), difficulties in business, difficulties in preaching — the world teems with these things *when the wind is in the east*.

We meet with many people who cannot earn enough wages, others who do not believe they were ever well treated since they

were born, others, again, who are highly deserving people, but have never yet been appreciated as they should be, and these all come out in crowds *when the wind is in the east*. Good men become rabid for something new, find fault with old friends, invite debate, and quarrel about nothing, and this happens most often *when the wind is in the east*.

When this kind of spirit gets among Christian people it is very sad, but surely there must be a remedy for it. Many nostrums are proposed, many quacks are ready to prescribe this and that form of remedy for troubles and discords, but the results of the east wind are not to be removed in that way, a higher power is needed. I have heard of pills for the earthquake, and medicine for the comet, but I have no such patent medicine for the east wind. All I have to tell you is borrowed from an old Book, in which the wisest prescriptions are to be found, prescriptions so excellent that, if they were followed, the inhabitant would no more say, "I am sick."

This windy night I shall take you to the great Physician of souls, JEHOVAH-Rophi—the Lord who heals us, who is able to cure all our diseases and to give permanent relief from all evil, so that our spirits shall be at rest. I believe that we have a prescription in this verse which, if it is well attended to, will deliver you out of all troubles, make you sing all your lives long, and help you to travel from earth to heaven, and be all the while as happy as the birds in the air. Here it is—"Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you are called in one body, and be you thankful." If we dissect our text we shall find in it four pieces of advice.

I. First, POSSESS THE PEACE OF GOD — "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts."

It cannot rule in your hearts if you have never felt its power, therefore, make certain that you are truly reconciled to God by Jesus Christ. Many persons have peace, but alas, it is false peace!

They have the peace of a soft, gentle, timorous, time-serving character—a mean sort of peace, which, if it hurts no one else, often ruins its possessor. Some have the peace of ignorance, the peace of stupidity, the peace of utter indifference, false peace. These are the followers of those false prophets who cried, “Peace, peace,” where there was no peace.

Woe to the man whose peace of mind is like the deadly smoothness of the current just as it nears the cataract! Many are at ease in a condition which might make a wise man’s hair turn grey in a night. They were never emptied from vessel to vessel, and therefore they are settled upon their lees, but they shall be poured out to their utter confusion. They think right well of themselves, but already the axe of judgment is lifted against them.

The peace that we need to possess is the peace of God, which means I think, first, *peace with God*. Oh, what a blessed thing it is to feel that the great cause of quarrel between our fallen spirit and the great Spirit is taken away—that we are reconciled to God by the death of His Son—that sin, the great divider, has been cast into the depths of the sea, and that there is established between us and God a happy fellowship! I hope many of you are at this hour enjoying such peace. If you have it, rejoice in it. If you, then, be at peace with God, do not perpetually act as if that peace were questionable and doubtful. Do not sigh and cry as if the matter trembled in the balance. If we believe in Jesus Christ, “being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Oh! the joy of knowing that “as far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us,” and that therefore they can never return from so immense a distance—yes, never return at all, for the Lord Jesus Christ has cast them into the depths of the sea, and if they be searched for they shall not be found, yea, they shall not be, says the Lord.

Blessed is that man who has peace with God through the atoning blood!

Growing out of this there comes, next, a peace with God with regard to all His providences, which can only come through a complete and entire submission to the divine will, for some there are who are not at peace with God, even about a certain providence that afflicted them years ago. They remain quarrelling with God about the decease of a beloved wife, or child, or mother, and they cannot forgive God for having taken a flower out of His own garden. If they were wise they would not thus rebel, but find in their loving Savior a recompense for all their losses. Was not that fine of Andromache, when she remembered that she had lost all her relatives except her husband, and gazing on him with delight, said,

“While my Hector still survives, I see
My father, mother, brethren, all in thee”?

Cannot a believer say the same of the Lord Jesus? Far be it from us to raise a question about what the providence of God has already done! It must be right. The point is to keep on submitting to that providence in what is now transpiring. If for the present the will of the Lord should send me poverty, obscurity, pain, weariness, reproach, I must be at peace with God about it all. If the Lord says to me, “Go across the sea, and leave all your friends,” I must not delay. If He says, “Preach unwelcome truth, which will make you enemies,” I must not hesitate. If He says, “Keep the house with rheumatism,” I must not come out of doors. If the Lord says, “Lie on your back and cough,” it is not for me to quarrel with Him, and say it ought not to be so.

If He denies us that which we think would make us not only more happy but more useful, it is of no use for us to kick

against the pricks. The divine appointment will certainly be fulfilled, and the misery to us will be in struggling against the yoke, in endeavoring to have it otherwise than divine love and infinite wisdom have determined it should be. If you cannot change your place, change your mind, till your mind shall take to your place, and you shall love it.

Why, there have been men so helped of God to conquer self that they have hugged their crosses. I think it is Rutherford who somewhere says that he was half afraid lest he should begin to love his cross better than Christ. That is a fear which will seldom need to cross our minds, but oh, we ought to be perfectly satisfied, perfectly content with that which pleases God! “If this be the Lord’s will it is my will,” such a saying comes from a happy heart, but if God has one will and we have another, it is clear that the peace of God does not yet rule our hearts.

Though forgiven, and though the grand cause of quarrel is gone, yet we are raising minor points of difference, and these gender strife. It is like a great lawsuit that has been decided on all the grand features of the case, and yet here is the plaintiff picking little points, and raising little questions, and getting up fresh litigation. The point with us is to say, “It is all given up. Whatsoever You will, Lord, I will, or at least I wish to will. I ask for grace that I may will it, because You will it.” This voluntary submission to our Father’s appointment is the peace of God.

This peace of God is, also, *peace such as God commends* — such as God approves of. That, you know, is first, perfect peace with Himself, and then with all men—certainly with His people, but also with all mankind. “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” Take heed that you do not offend, and if you are offended by others, do not offend in return, but accept the offense in patience, forgive it and forget

it. Forbear, and when you have done so, forbear, and when you have done so again, forbear, and when you have forborne seven times, still forbear.

I will not repeat the advice seventy times seven, though if I did, I should not go beyond the measure of forbearance and of forgiveness which the Lord Jesus would have us display. Be so at peace with God that you feel perfectly at peace with your fellow men. Whenever I have suffered a grievous wrong, it has been a satisfaction to me to feel that, if my Lord Jesus Christ made atonement for my offenses and my wrongs, I can look at His atonement as an atonement for the wrong done to me as well as to God, for He satisfied all parties in that quarrel.

Gladly do I say, “Surely, this poor soul may well be forgiven by me, for You have died as the sinners’ Substitute.” In comparison with my own offenses against God, I may well look upon this man’s offense as less than nothing. What if men should do the worst they can do to us? What is it? What if they slay us? It is but a small loss to a Christian to die. Therefore let us harbor no malice, but feel, “No, we have entered into the truce of God, and we are the friends of every man that breathes.” For my own part, I have a crusade against the devil and all evil, but the truce of God is upon me with regard to all my fellow men, and from now on that peace which was proclaimed at Bethlehem by the angels shall stand for me — “Peace on earth: good will toward men.” This is a sweet part of the peace of God, cultivate it carefully.

But this peace is called the peace of God because *it is peace which God works in the soul*. I think I hear you exclaim, “To have such a peace as that—a perfect consciousness of full forgiveness, complete acquiescence in the will of God, perfect forgiveness towards all mankind, and an intense desire to live in perfect peace with all, both saints and sinners—how can I get such a peace within me?” Ah, indeed, how can you? It is

impossible to unrenewed human nature. Man by nature is worse than any wild beast, for he is a menagerie. There is lion in him, and there is serpent in him; there is tiger in him, and there is wolf in him; there is dog in him, and there is devil in him. He is half beast and half devil through the fall. I do not caricature him, his body allies him to the beast, and sin makes him a child of Satan.

Mr. Whitefield used so to describe fallen nature, and he was pretty near the mark. How shall this wild beast be taught to love? Shall the lion eat straw like an ox? It never will till it leaves off being a lion. It cannot do so, it has not fit teeth for eating straw, or a fit stomach for digesting grass. It cannot live on straw, like an ox, till God changes it, and gives it an ox-like nature.

So it is with us, we need a new nature before we can possess this peace with God. But how is that to be done? Shall the Ethiopian change his skin? No, he cannot do that, and if he could, it would not equal the miracle which we require. Our default is not skin deep only, it is much more than that. Changing skins is difficult, but changing hearts is impossible except to God. Shall the leopard get rid of his spots? Well, that is difficult, but still the task of taking spots out of leopards would be small compared with the miracle of taking evil out of the very core of our wild beast like heart, and putting into it the peace of God that makes us love. God only can do it. God's own mighty Spirit must put forth that same energy with which He will raise the dead out of their graves at the resurrection, for nothing short of creation and resurrection power is able to transmute this beastly, devilish heart of ours into a heart in which the peace of God shall reign supreme. Well is it called the peace of God.

My dear hearer, do you know this peace? If so, you will understand that, *because of its excellence, it is called the peace of God.*

It is a Hebraism, for among the Hebrews they called certain mountains that were higher than others the hills of God, and certain gigantic trees, such as the cedars of Lebanon, were the trees of God that were full of sap. So the peace that is greater than every other peace is called the peace of God — it means the holiest, deepest peace. It is “perfect peace” — peace that nothing disturbs, deep peace — “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,” solemn peace at which you almost stand in awe—a hush within the soul in which there is heard nothing of discord or of fear, but stillness reigns like that which was maintained in the Holy of Holies, within the veil, where seraphim were silent above the mercy seat. “The peace of God” signifies the peace that never ends, everlasting peace, the peace that will live with us throughout the whole of our mortal sojourn till we come into the land of the immortal —

“There shall I bathe my weary soul
In seas of heavenly rest,
And not a wave of trouble roll
Across my peaceful breast.”

“The peace of God,” Oh, I have known it! You too, my brethren, must have known it when the Lord Himself has dwelt within your hearts, and kept all adversaries far away. You have then known days of heaven upon the earth. It has left nothing to wish for except the perpetuation of itself, for you have been satisfied with favor and full of the goodness of the Lord, filled with all the fullness of God, anchored fast, settled, grounded, established—

“My heart is resting, O my God!
I will give thanks and sing.

My heart is at the secret source
Of every precious thing.”

That is the peace of God.

Win it, dear friends, and wear it. By God’s good Spirit enter into this serene haven. Rest in the Lord, and be happy in Him, for He is our peace! When the Lord and Giver of peace once comes to tarry in your heart let Him rest there, and charge all about you, by the roes and by the hinds of the field, that they stir not up nor awake your love until He please.

II. But now the second piece of advice that grows out of the text let us consider. If you possess this peace of God, let it occupy the throne, **LET THE PEACE OF GOD RULE IN YOUR HEARTS.**

In order to there being any peace in the heart, or anywhere else, there must be a ruler. Those people who are for putting down all kings and principalities and powers may bid farewell to peace. Anybody who is inclined to anarchy should read Carlyle’s “French Revolution” through with care, and ask himself whether the worst king is not, after all, a great deal better than the despotism of the mob, the carnival of misrule, wherein every man does that which is right in his own eyes, and all eyes love darkness rather than light. Let loose the reins of government, let everybody be equal to everybody else, and a little bigger than everybody else as well, and you will soon see what confusion ensues.

See how it is in a house! I hear that there was great deliberation over those census papers in many families to know who was the head of the household, but I am quite clear that it was not a happy household where that question took long to answer, for the husband is the head of the wife, and where he is not so, everything is out of order, monstrous, outrageous. Where the head is not the head, the hand is not the hand, the

eye is not the eye, the heart is not the heart, and nothing is itself at all. All is what it should not be, and all is misery.

You must have a governing faculty somewhere, and within your own soul, if nothing governs, I tell you boldly the devil governs. That man who does not control himself is controlled by the devil, for he must have a master somewhere. We cannot have two masters, but it is quite as certain that we must have one. One power or another will master you. Shall it be your Creator, or His enemy? your Savior or your destroyer?

It is a blessed gift of grace if a man is enabled by the Holy Spirit to say — “The peace of God shall rule in my heart.” Paul advised this, “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts,” if it is in your hearts at all, it must rule, for it has power to put down all rebellion. You know, when we have a government and magistracy with power at their back, if a riot arises, we appeal to the lawful power to come and protect us, and put down the uproar.

So in our hearts, if we have a master principle, and that master principle is the peace of God, we may warrantably pray, “O Lord, put down this riot. I am tossed to and fro in my heart about my circumstances, I do not like them, and I quarrel with God about them. Come, peace of God, come, and put down my murmuring. Come and calm my wicked, discontented spirit.”

Or do I feel some discord in my spirit towards one whom I ought to love? I must cry, “Come, peace of God. Come, and arrest this bad temper of mine. Handcuff it. Take it off to prison. Give it hard labor and short commons; bring it down till it is no longer able to rebel as it does. Come, peace of God, and help me in the struggles of my daily life, that I may not break out into anger, and wrath, and malice, and all uncharitableness. Come, peace of God, put forth Your mighty power over my soul.” This is the great remedy for the discord

within and the discords without, the grand cure for all distempers of the east wind, and all besides.

Yield yourself to the umpireship of the blessed peace of God, for I find that the Greek word has that force — “Let the peace of God umpire in your hearts.” You know the umpire in the Greek games decided how the runners should run, how the wrestlers should wrestle, and he ruled a contest to be, or not to be, according to the law of the festival. He said, perhaps, that such and such a blow in the fight was a foul blow, and if he said so, there was no questioning him, it was decided. He stood at the winning point when the runners came in, and he declared a certain swift-footed racer to be the winner. No man ever questioned the dictate of the umpire. His voice ended all debate. He was the man who decided in the games, and whose verdict was never to be disputed.

Now, the peace of God is to do the same in our hearts. We ought to be resolved to judge all things by the peace of God. “What ought I to do in this case? Must I humble myself? I do not like it, but how ought I to act? Shall I yield?” Pride says, “Never! No, no. Play the man. Never give in.” But what does the peace of God say? It says, “Yield, submit.” Christ says, “I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.”

Christ decides that it will be good to be a sufferer rather than to take revenge. We ought to have the peace of God ruling in our hearts so as to let it decide our course, and lead us to do that which is consistent with our own peace with God. I do not know how you find it, but I know that I cannot afford to be angry. It takes so much that is valuable out of me. I am sure it does. It does a man an immense mischief physically, to some

men it is a dangerous thing to get excited, and it even endangers their lives.

But, spiritually, I believe that to get into a state of enmity towards anybody is one of the most grievous diseases which can befall a Christian. In such a case you cannot pray as you did, you cannot read some passages of Scripture as you did, you cannot look the Well-beloved in the face, and say, “I am acting in a way that pleases You.” It is, therefore, a very serious thing for a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ to break his own peace — serious to himself as well as to those that are round about him. I pray you therefore dear friends, let the peace of God decide for you in all trials of temper, and endurings of wrong, and questions which lead to debate and separation. Set peace in the chariot, and let it hold the reins, for anger will, like Phaeton of old, set the world on fire. Oh, Peace of God, rule you me!

Pray God that the power of this peace may be constantly upon you. If you lose your peace with God you lose your power to judge under difficulties, you lose your power of self-control under provocations, you lose the best sovereign that ever held a scepter. I believe that if a man is walking with God in the light, and enjoying full fellowship with heaven, he may go down into any meeting, however turbulent— into any society, however discordant the elements may be—and yet he will be wise to answer, wise to be silent, wise to do, or wise not to do, for the peace of God will keep him calm and quiet. Once let the mind be thoroughly disturbed and unhinged before the Lord, and you are weak as another man, and you say that which you will have to unsay, and you do that which you would wish to wipe out with your tears.

When rest of soul is gone, hard things are spoken and hard things are done, which would not consort with communion with the tender Lord. Let the peace of God always rule, or

otherwise you will not always be safe. Especially, let the peace of God rule your affections. Be satisfied that you love God, and that your heart cleaves to God, and does not follow after any other. Be at peace with God as to your heart, and when that is so, and the affections are dominated by conscious love to God, it is then that you fight the battles of life with comfort to yourself, and with honor to the name of Him to whom you belong.

III. Very briefly, I want, in the third place, to say, **STRENGTHEN YOURSELF**, dear friend, **BY GOD’S SPIRIT, WITH ARGUMENTS**, in order that you may let the peace of God rule in your hearts, and may be kept from any breach of that heavenly peace.

Remember, *you can only be happy in heart and healthy in spirit as long as you keep the peace of God*. You are sure to become wretched and unhappy, you are sure to stumble here and there into faults, if that peace of God be gone. As you would be in the best possible condition for walking with God in joy while here below, look, to your peace. This is no mean argument; try to feel the force of it.

And next, *only thus can the church of God prosper*. I am grieved when I receive members from other churches, who come because they say that they are weary of the incessant bickerings and jealousies which have disturbed their rest. I am sure that there can be no blessing where there is no peace. A house divided against itself cannot stand. A church disputing is a church committing suicide. Many and many a church has come to its death by bleeding inwardly through strife, otherwise it might have defied the whole world, and hell itself. It is generally the little churches that squabble most, if they cannot excel in anything else, they certainly claim the first rank in quarrelling.

A few Christian people get together to serve God, and the devil comes in at once and sets them by the ears, they are good

men and true, but Satan bewitches them so that they dispute about nothing at all. Whenever I have to settle a dispute, I always like to have some big, bad thing in it. This I can point out, and we soon agree to set the matter right. When I cannot with microscopes on my eyes find out what it is all about, I find that brothers and sisters are hardest to be reconciled. It is easier to shoot an owl than a gnat. Little differences rankle like tiny thorns, and you cannot get them out of the flesh.

Oh, that the Spirit of God would come upon the churches, and turn them into masses of fire, then they would not fall to pieces through intestine strife! When souls are being won, when the Gospel is being enjoyed, when Christ is being glorified, when the church is marching on, conquering and to conquer through the divine power that is in her, then is there peace within her borders, and her citizens are filled with the finest of the wheat. But once let the life of God run low, and let the Spirit of God depart, then peace departs too. Oh, may God save this church and save all the churches from missing this blessed peace! Let the peace of God rule in your heart, dear brother, dear sister, for the church's sake.

Remember, next, that *God cannot be glorified unless there is the peace of God in our hearts*. My dear friend, if you are always troubled, and fretting, and anxious, I do not see how you, can glorify God to any large extent. Seek more faith, more trust, more confidence, more calm of mind, and you will personally glorify God. I am sure a Christian man who always finds fault with everybody is of little service to the cause and kingdom of our Lord. He who, wherever he goes, acts like a carrion crow, that soars aloft with no other design than finding out where a carcass may be, that he may light upon it — he, I say, is not a man after God's own heart, neither will he advance the Lord's work among men.

When you love your fellow Christians so that their faults are covered by your charity, and you rather admire their excellences than publish their infirmities, then it is that God is glorified by you. A happy, peaceful people of whom men can say, “See how these Christians love one another” — these shine as lights in the world, and the darkness feels their power.

The passage from which our text is taken offers us other reasons. It says this — *“To the which also ye are called.”* You were called to the peace of God. My dear brother, if you are not a peaceful man you have not inherited your true calling. When the Lord called you out from the world, He called you to be a peacemaker. He called you on purpose that the Spirit of peace might be shed abroad in your heart, and that afterwards you might carry that peace with you into your own family and among all your neighbors, and spread it everywhere.

The Lord Jesus never called a man to be a maker of strife. If a Christian woman, as she calls herself, goes from house to house with tittle-tattle, she was not called by God to do so, of that I am certain. A man goes into his pulpit, and preaches a personal sermon on purpose to empty out his own spleen. God did not call him to that, for God loves not firebrands. The man may have been sent as a messenger from other regions, but certainly not as an ambassador from heaven, when he preaches gall and wormwood. Some seem, wherever they go, to make mischief as speedily as possible, their mission is contention, whereunto they certainly were not called of God.

You who are the true heirs of heaven are called to peace, seek peace, and pursue it. Wherever you go, labor earnestly to make peace. If you see two boys fighting, make them leave off. If you see two girls in a bad temper, try to make them happy with one another. If you see two people disagree in business, do not back one of them up, and cry, “Go to law with him,” but plead for peace and mutual concession. “Blessed are the

peacemakers.” Whatever you may be in a household, whether father or child, husband or wife, master or servant, son-in-law or mother-in-law, let your soul be seasoned and savored with that blessed word, “Peace.”

There is always a war party in England, I fear the Jingo is no foreigner, but the genuine offspring of the British bulldog. An unconverted Britisher is all for blood, and fire, and glory, and as the unconverted are the majority among us we remain a fighting nation. Fighting—how we delight in it! Down with the Afghans, down with the Zulus! The Boers—destroy them! We cannot get our fill of glory and honor unless we get knee deep in blood. The policy of peace is voted dishonorable, and so we go from land to land till there is hardly a nation which has not been stained with blood by British hands. How fiercely these English talk, but it is not Christian talk. May the Lord teach us the language of peace. Be you at peace, “whereunto also you were called.”

And then, notice next, *“Called in one body.”* There must, therefore, be peace among Christians, because we are called in one body to peace. What would you think of my hand, if it should say, “I will have no peace with the eye? That prying eye looked sharply at me the other day and spied out a spot, I will put it out.” We shall not enjoy much prosperity if the members of the body thus disagree. Suppose my foot should say, “I am not going to carry that heavy body about. See what I have to suffer through it at times.” Suppose my knee should say, “I will not have it. I have been tortured quite enough with rheumatism, I will no longer carry that heavy fabric.” What will become of me if the members of my body thus fall to quarrelling? And what is to become of the glory of Christ if His members live in contention?

What is the Head to do if the members who make up His one mystical body have nothing to do but to be striving one

against the other? Oh, no. If you have any differences, end them tonight, I pray you, if you can, even though the east wind is so piercing. If you have unwittingly done anything that grieves others, try to remedy it. Or if others have grieved you, end the matter by sweet and swift forgiveness. Let it be all ended with the east wind. We are called in one body, therefore let us dwell in hearty peace, and may God the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of peace, bring us into the peace of God, and keep us there, for thereunto we are called in one body.

IV. The last point upon which I shall speak is this—to keep yourselves right, **OCCUPY YOUR MINDS HEALTHILY.**

“How?” say you. The text says, “*Be ye thankful.*” That is the way to keep up our peace with God. “Be thankful.” Do not complain, but bless His name for everything. Do not quarrel with Him, but be thankful. Say, “Shall we receive good at the hands of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil? The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord.” That is the way to be at peace with Him—to be thankful at all times.

Bless God for your mercies and for your miseries, bless Him for your gains and for your losses, bless Him for your enjoyments and pleasures, and also for your aches and pains. Bless Him for every hard thing that comes from Him, for there is as much love in the hard as in the soft, and God is as kind when He uses the rod as when He gives a kiss. “Be ye thankful!” Bless Him from morning to night, and all through the night watches. What a mercy to be out of the hospital! What a mercy to have the use of one’s limbs and reasoning powers! What a mercy to be out of prison! What a mercy to be out of hell! “He hath not dealt with us after our sins.” Be thankful.

Last Sunday morning when I read this chapter in the great congregation, I tried to ring it out as loudly as ever I could, and I would like to ring it out as with a whole peal of bells now. Set

them all ringing a marriage-peal, if you like— “Be ye thankful! Be ye thankful! Be ye thankful!” Up, you murmuring! Up, you discontented! “Be ye thankful.” Rouse yourselves, you sullen ones! You that think you have a heavier load to carry than is fit, and say, like Cain, “My burden is greater than I can bear”— “Be ye thankful!” All of you, young and old, “Be ye thankful.” That is the way to keep up your peace with God, and your peace with your fellow men.

Well, but it does not mean only, “Be thankful to God,” but be you thankful to your fellow men. Too many receive all kinds of Christian kindness as a matter of course. They look upon the spontaneous kindness of their brethren as a sort of right. Now, that the poor should be helped by Christian generosity is certainly according to Scripture, but this is an obligation not of debt but of grace. Whatever is done in almsgiving and charity should be gratefully and heartily received. It is an unholy spirit which scarcely has the courtesy to say “thank you.” Towards one another we ought to have a thankful spirit.

How thankful the child ought to be to his mother and his father! What a happy home we should have if children recognized the deep debt of obligation that is really due to those who have nursed them and cared for them so long! How obliged, I think, the husband ought to be to his wife for all her tender kindnesses—those hundred unseen ministries of love! How grateful, I think, the wife should be to her husband, for all his labors and anxieties! She receives a thousand things from him which make life comfortable. If we live in mutual gratitude, feeling that we are, each one of us, indebted to all others, how merrily will the household wheels go round, and what families of love we shall all gather around us!

I, of all the people in the world, am most in debt to everybody, and I feel it deeply and truly. There is hardly a person that I look upon from this pulpit but I owe something

to his or her Christian love. Everybody has been kind to me, and I am not unmindful of it. When I have lain upon my bed sick and ill, I have marveled at the kindness of you all. I wonder why you treat me so lovingly. In all holy work, whether it is the College or Orphanage, you have been my ready helpers, and you are still. I cannot help saying, “God bless you.” Surely the wind is changing a point or two, we shall find it blowing from another quarter when we leave this Tabernacle.

I feel intense gratitude in my soul towards the dear brethren who surround me, and the sisters that work with me for Christ. You have often made me happy and cheered my spirit by the kind and generous way in which you have worked with me for the Lord, bearing with all my infirmities, and I believe that it is because I feel thankful that I feel peaceful, and so remain the center of your unity. I am not inclined to quarrel with anybody, I would sooner run a mile than I would fight for half a minute. There is nobody in the world that I would like to contend with, my heart is full of good wishes to all men. It has been a sort of rule with me to measure a man before I fight him, if he is bigger than I am I know he will beat me, so I decline battle, and if he is smaller, and I can easily beat him, it would be cruel and cowardly to do so.

Nobody in the world is worth contending against as to our temporal interests. Even the necessary law is troublesome and vexatious. Be you thankful, then, and if, with thankfulness to God and thankfulness to those around you, you can fill up the day, oh, how happy will the days be! In the family and in the business God will be glorified, the church will be sweetened and welded together, we shall see better times, and shall no longer grumble at *the east wind*.

May God bless you!

1694 THE USE OF THE BOW – 2 SAM. 1:17-18

A Sermon
Delivered at a Thursday Evening Lecture,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son: (Also he bade them teach the children of Judah the use of the bow: behold, it is written in the book of Jasher). — 2 Samuel 1:17-18

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Psalm 66]

THE TRANSLATORS HAVE ACTED very properly in inserting the words, “the use of,” for that is what the passage means, but if you read it without those words the sense is still the same — “He bade them teach the children of Judah the bow,” that is to say, how to use the bow.

In modern times, critics have said that by the expression “the bow” is meant the song which David composed, and to sustain their notion—they quote from the Koran of Mohammed, in which they tell us that there is a certain chapter called “the Cow,” and therefore David called his song “the bow,” as if so late an instance of oriental usage was at all to the point. I declare that there is nothing whatever in Scripture to justify the statement that the words, “the bow,” can be applied to David’s lament. No doubt some of the Psalms have titles given to them, but there is never an instance of a psalm being quoted by its title. It is quoted by its number, never by its name.

I accept the passage as our learned translators understood it—David bade them teach the children of Judah the bow. If any inquire, “What then is the connection? Why should David teach the people the use of the bow because Saul and Jonathan were slain? Why is the military order concerning the use of a certain instrument of war inserted here, when the passage is full of lamentation?” I answer—most fitly, as I shall have to show you. It was the best memorial of that skillful archer Jonathan, and of the other princes who had fallen by the arrows of the Philistines, that from the disastrous day of their slaughter David caused his own tribe, over which he had chief power, to be trained in the use of that special weapon of war.

I. But now to our work. From my text I want to gather a few useful lessons. And the first is this — **ACTIVITY IS A VALUABLE SOLACE FOR SORROW.** The people were very grieved, for Saul and Jonathan, the king and the crown prince, were slain. David indulges their grief. He writes them a plaintive song which the daughters of Israel may sing. But to take their minds off their distress, he at the same time issues the order to teach the children of Judah the use of the bow, for activity is an effectual remedy in the time of sorrow. Certainly the opposite of it would tend towards blank despair. Are any of you in great grief? Have you suffered a supreme loss? Do not be tempted to brood over your affliction, and to think that you ought to be excused from further service. Do not shut yourself up to meditate upon the great ill that has befallen you, so as to nurse your wrath against God. This can do you no good whatever. Rather imitate David, who, when his child was sick, fasted and prayed, but when it was dead, went into the house and ate bread, for he said, “Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.”

I beseech you do not fall under the temptation of Satan to cease from your daily activity, and especially from any holy

service in which you are engaged for Christ. It may be that your sorrow is not a bereavement, but disappointment in your work. You have not won those souls that you looked to win, and some that you thought were converted have gone back. And now Satan tempts you to do no more — never to cast the net again, for you have toiled all night and taken nothing — never to sow again, for you have wasted your seed by the highway, and birds have devoured it. This is a suggestion of the evil one. It will lead you into deeper anguish. I would say to you, O mourner, get up from the couch of ease! Shake yourself from the dust, O virgin daughter of Zion! Sit not down upon the dunghill in your grief, but bestir yourself, lest you sink into blacker woe, and your bitterness become as wormwood and gall.

While inaction will lead into blank despair, I am certain that work distracts the mind from the sad point upon which it is apt to thrust itself. Nothing is healthier than having work to do. I have seen persons of leisure give way most terribly in the case of the loss of children, while I have known laboring people, who, I believe have been as sensitive in heart, who have kept up bravely. Under God, I have attributed the difference to the fact that the poor woman must go to earn her daily bread, or must get about her domestic duties whatever happens, and the poor man must do his daily task, or else the family will be in need. Thus, toil has proved to be a blessed necessity by withdrawing the mind from the sorrow which would have engrossed it. You have heard of Alexander Cruden. Perhaps you do not know that he was crossed in love, and met with certain other trials which drove him nearly mad, and yet Alexander Cruden did not become insane, for he engaged upon the immense work of forming a concordance of sacred Scripture, which concordance has become the great instrument by which we search the Word of God. This work kept him

from becoming altogether insane. If I had to prescribe to “a mind diseased,” I would say, “Enter upon good work and keep at it.” Dear friends, if you are in trouble and Satan tempts you to get alone, and to cease from the work of the Lord, resist the injurious suggestion. God the Holy Spirit is most likely to comfort you, and to apply the precious promises of His word to your soul, if you pursue your Master’s work with all your heart. Attend to His business, and He will attend to your business. Tell poor sinners about His wounds, and He will bind up yours. Forget your cross in His. Forget your griefs in the griefs of the sons of men who are perishing for lack of knowledge and you shall find the readiest way to consolation.

A valuable solace for sorrow is activity, especially, I think, in reference to *new* work. It will help you much if a new trouble suggests to you new service. Old work does not always take the mind off from its vexatious, for we are apt to do it mechanically, and as a matter of routine, but something altogether fresh will aid us sweetly to forget our trial. Oh, to strike out some new path! To invent new honors for Jesus, new enterprises for His kingdom, new attractions for His gospel—this will help to charm away our griefs. With many, the doing of any kind of service for Christ will be quite a novelty. I grieve to say it. These people are desponding. I am not so grieved at that, because if any man will not work, neither shall he eat. And if a Christian will not serve his Master, he shall not feast with the King’s worthies. Oh, how much of joy many of you miss by not doing more for the poor, more for the ignorant, more for Christ! The poet Rogers tells us — and he throws the story into poetry which I forget — of a rich man in Venice who was the subject of despair, and became such a hypochondriac that he went down to the canal to drown himself. But on the way he was met by a poor little boy who tugged at his coat and begged for bread. When the rich man called him an impostor, the boy

besought him to come home with him, and see his father and mother who were dying of starvation. He went up into the room, and found the family literally perishing for lack of food. He laid out the money which he had in his pocket in making them all glad with a hearty meal, and then he said to himself that there was something worth living for after all. He had found a novel enjoyment, which gave a fresh motive for living. I would like to ask you who have suffered a great trouble whether the Lord may not be pressing you by this means, into a new path of delight, directing you to a fresh method of glorifying God and doing good to your fellow men. I will sing you a song if you will, as sorrowful as David's lament, but I would rather teach you the use of the bow. I believe that I shall minister better to your comfort if I enlist you as soldiers in Christ's army, and teach you to use His weapons, than if I should console you with the most plaintive minstrelsy of sadness.

Do I speak to any here present who endure great earthly afflictions, but know nothing of spiritual things? Is it not the case that God often brings His wandering children to Himself by distresses? The way in which you are to be comforted, dear friends, is not by going into the world again, and seeking further pleasures there. If God means to bless you, He may allow you to become so hungry that you may wish to fill your belly with the husks. You have spent your living riotously, and now you are ready to despair. Round by that dark corner of despair may be the way to your Father's house. To expel your present temporal grief, you need a spiritual grief concerning sin. If you learn of Jesus at this hour to repent of sin, and to put your trust in Him, your soul will be awakened to say, "I will arise, and go unto my Father," and then you will lose your hunger, and forget the swine trough. Where? Why, amidst the music and dancing of your Father's house, and in the joy of hearing Him say, "Let

us eat, and be merry, for this My son was dead, and is alive again, He was lost, and is found.” Yes, David was right. The way to raise the people out of their despondency was to teach them the use of the bow, their own arrows would slay their grief, and the way to get you mourning ones out of your sorrow is to teach you those holy activities which lead a soul to trust in Christ, and to find salvation at His feet.

That is the first lesson which, I think, the text most sweetly teaches.

II. A second lesson is that **AN ADMIRABLE USE OF DISASTER IS TO LEARN ITS LESSONS.** What was the disaster? Saul and Jonathan had been shot by archers. The Philistines were evidently strong in the use of the bow, but Saul’s army was short of archers, and so they were not able to strike the Philistines at a distance. Before they came to close quarters, where Israel might have been a match for Philistia, the arrows of the Philistines had reached their king. Had they known how to use the bow, they might have been conquerors, and therefore David hastens to teach the men of Judah the use of the bow.

Beloved friends, I will suppose that you have met with failures. I refer to disasters peculiar to you. What shall you do? Sit down and fret and trouble yourselves, and give up in despair? God forbid. As the men of Judah learned the use of the bow, through their being beaten by the bow, so you gather wisdom from that which has befallen you. Have you been made to fly before your adversary? Then *find out where your weakness is*. Search and see. Is it a sin indulged? Is it some point where you ought to have been guarded, but where you have been unwatchful? Is it weakness in prayer? Is it neglect of the Word of God? Is it indifference to divine truth? Is it coldness of heart? Or what is it? If you have been defeated, there is a cause for it. If you have been cast down and brought low, say unto God, “Show me why

You contend with me.” Has the Lord a controversy with you? Be not content till you have got to the bottom of it, and found out the root that bears this gall and wormwood. Is not this the way of wisdom? May it not happen that the cause of the disaster is that God is not with you? What if nothing prospers with you? What if it is vain for you to rise up early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness, since the hand of God is against you? What if you are to have no pleasure in the things that once gave you satisfaction, because God has set you as a target for His arrows, and in wrath is shooting at you? It may be so. Or you may not be one of His children at all as yet, and He may be tossing you to and fro like a ball, that you may never find rest until you humbly come and cry to Christ, and seek mercy at His hands. Look and see whether it is so. It is of no use to worry about the disaster, search out the cause of it. Strive to learn the lesson which it is meant to teach you. Is there any secret sin with you?

Perhaps by looking at the defeat you may *learn the way to victory*. David judged that if they were defeated by the bow, they might yet win by the bow. It is right to learn from our adversaries. There is something to be learned from Satan. If he goes about, let us be diligent; if he seeks whom he may devour, let us seek whom we may save; and if he watches carefully to find out our weak points, let us watch those whom we would bless to find out how we may best reach their hearts. Many a man has grown rich through poverty, healthy through sickness, and holy by being made conscious of sin. When he has been struck down, then has he cried out to God, and God has lifted him up. Woe to that man who will not “hear the rod and Him that has appointed it.”

I pray that you may diligently learn the lesson which every disaster would teach. May not a misfortune which happens to a church and to Christian people be to them *a call to action—to*

general action? Saul had a little standing army, and did not drill the entire nation for war, but David says, “I will teach all my own tribe the use of the bow.” Now, whenever a church begins to get low, dull, stupid—and many churches go in that direction—when everybody seems to be asleep, and the minister’s sermon is a kind of sanctified snore, and all the worship is steeped in slumber, why, what is to be done? Then is the time to teach the children of Judah the use of the bow, and to wake them all up to holy enterprise. Say to them, “You must not allow a few to be doing the work of Christ, but all must do it. You must all be taught the use of the bow.” It was the glory of the Moravians that all their members were missionaries, and such ought to be the glory of every church. Every man, woman, and child in the church should take part in the battle for Jesus. This, by God’s grace, is the cure for spiritual decline; teach the people the use of the bow. Let us learn lessons from defeat.

Let us learn from the sin which has cast us down to cry unto God, the mighty One, to hold us up. If we are at this time under some great failure in life, let us learn greater care. If we have been permitted to err, let us learn to watch. Do not sullenly confess, “I have done wrong,” but repent of it, and ask God for grace that you may be upheld in the future, like Peter, who was stronger after his fall than before it, and was set to strengthen his brethren. What is done cannot be undone, but we may so learn from it by God’s teaching, that we may never do the same again. May God grant that this may be the case. If it were proper, I could sing to you tonight a song of mourning over the disasters of a soul, or of a church, but I believe that I would not do you half as much good as by stirring you up to learn the use of the bow, that is to say, to rectify your errors, and supply your defects.

III. Now, thirdly, another lesson. **A NOBLE MONUMENT TO A FRIEND IS TO IMITATE HIS EXCELLENCIES.** How does that come from the text? Why, thus. When Jonathan and David communed together, they fixed the meeting by Jonathan's shooting certain arrows. It is evident that Jonathan was a man, who greatly favored the use of the bow, and though his father did not largely introduce it into the army, yet Jonathan was well skilled therein. "Well then," says David, "in memory of Jonathan, instead of piling up a great monument, we will teach the children of Judah the use of the bow." Come, brethren, let this be your memorial to your dear father—if he was a child of God, be like him. If you want to keep in memory your beloved mother, exhibit in yourselves the virtues that shone in her. That sweet child of yours has gone to heaven, and can never be forgotten, and her likeness hangs over the mantelpiece. I mean that dear little child who sang of Jesus when she died. If you want to remember her beyond all forgetfulness, then love her Savior, and go where little Jane has gone. No memorial is more fit than imitation. Be yourself the monument, by exhibiting within yourself all that was good in the dear departed one.

How especially true is this in connection with our divine Lord! I see the Romanist continually putting up crosses by the roadside, and sometimes on these there are hideous representations of a person dying by crucifixion, and there are nails, and sponge, and spear, and I know not what. This arises out of a natural desire to perpetuate the memory of the crucified Redeemer, but you will do far better, dear brother, if you are, yourself, crucified with Christ, and if you exhibit in your own person that divine self-denial, that blessed love, that superlative holiness, which was found in Him. Some will build a church, and lavish money upon architecture. I shall not condemn them, for their splendid generosity may savor of the spirit of that woman who broke the alabaster box, and poured

the ointment upon the Savior's feet. But I would suggest that to build up within one's self, by the power of God's Spirit, the Christ-like character is a better memorial than the best piece of architecture that can ever be put together. What if you should employ the greatest of sculptors, and he, with cunning hand, should mold the marble till it emulated life? Would not the monument mainly keep in mind the artist and rather make men think of the costliness of the work than of anything else? Whereas, if you become yourself, not in marble, but in living flesh, the image of Christ, then men will take notice of you that you have been with Jesus, and have learned of Him, and this will keep Him best in memory. If we do what Christ would have done under our circumstances, we shall be exhibiting a far better memorial of Him than wealth can possibly purchase. When David taught these people the use of the bow, every time they stringed an arrow they might remember Jonathan, and whenever a regiment of archers went through the streets to the battle, they brought Jonathan before the public mind. David instituted this form of royal artillery on purpose that Jonathan might be kept in mind. And you, dear friends, every time you go forth to do the service of God, obediently and zealously, as Jesus did it, you put men in mind of Jesus, and they say, "God has set these men in the world to be witnesses for Christ, to keep His name alive in the earth. These men are a blessing because Jesus Himself has blessed them." I would thus stir you all up to endeavor all the days of your life so to live and serve God that the name of Jesus Christ shall be kept alive in this nation, and throughout the world.

IV. Lastly, and but for a moment, I think that the form which this military order took, to teach the children of Judah the use of the bow, may be allegorically applied tonight to you, dear friends. **IT IS A GREAT ADVANTAGE TO BELIEVERS TO LEARN THE USE OF THE BOW SPIRITUALLY.** First, there is

the bow of prayer. Its use has not gone out of date, but I wish that all of us knew how to shoot the arrows of the Lord's deliverance much better than we do. Holy men of old would pick out an arrow, and when they had chosen it they knew how to use it. They knew what they needed, and they prayed for it. They fitted their arrow on the string, that is to say, they took God's promise, the promise that answered their desire and fitting the one to the other, and they took straight aim at heaven and watched the flight of the arrow petition. They knew to whom they were praying, as well as what they were praying for, and why they expected to be heard, and so they drew the bow of prayer with all their might. When the man of God went up to the top of Carmel, and there took his bow and drew it, there was no fear of his missing the mark, or if, perhaps, the arrow had not force enough, he would pull the bow a second time, and a third time, and a fourth time, and a seventh time, till at last the arrow struck the mark. He would not come down from his watchtower till he knew that the arrow of his prayer was lodged in heaven. In all times of tribulation, what is needed is that the children of Judah should know the use of the bow of prayer.

When we heard of those fearful assassinations in Ireland, the news reached the bulk of us on the Sabbath day, and men of God went to their loopholes of retreat, and shot up to heaven prayers for poor Ireland. It was the best thing that could be done. I have more faith in prayer than in police and prisons. In any time of national need the men that save a nation are the men of prayer. What, not the wise statesmen? Certainly, wise statesmen, but who makes them wise? God has power over all minds, and in answer to the prayer from this pulpit, He can visit yonder mind in St. Stephen's. From a humble cottage in the western highlands there may go up to God a cry that shall come down upon the Prime Minister, and direct his thoughts.

Remember what Queen Mary used to say when she wanted to bring popery back to Scotland. She said that she was more afraid of John Knox's prayers than of all the armies that the Scottish lords could get together. She was right for once. When men overlook prayer they overlook the greatest factor in human affairs. The mystic rod of God is in the hand of many a Moses still among us— a rod which brings victory to Israel, and defeat to Amalek. The strength of the church lies not in the oratory of the pulpit, but in the oratory of the closet. That church of God that shall do most for the world is the church that shall do most with God. He can rule men for God who is ruled by God for men. He that gives up his soul to God that God may write His will upon his life is the mighty man. The man who has had the will of God worked in him by the Holy Spirit, and can work it out into fervent prayer, is the man who, though princes and potentates know it not, sits nearer to the helm of affairs than they can reach. I could write you a plaintive hymn about the woes of Ireland, and about the sins of men and the evils of the times, but I had far rather teach you the use of the bow of prayer, for then, if you could send your longings up to the Lord, full many a blessing would come upon the land, and the adversaries of the Lord would be discomforted, and peaceful and happy days would dawn.

Perhaps I speak to some here who do not know anything about praying. I dare say that the brother is here who listened to a sermon on Peckham Rye, which was rather a wild one, I am afraid. In that discourse the preacher said to his entire congregation that if they would go home and ask God for anything the Lord would give it to them. I cannot endorse so wild a statement. However, this man thought that the preacher having said it, it was true, and having never prayed before in all his life, he put the question to the test of a certain event, and that certain event fell out as he desired. Then he began to

tremble, for he judged that assuredly there is a God. Now, I do not say to you, dear hearers, that whatever all of you shall ask in prayer you shall receive. I would not say that to you ungodly ones. But I do say that if you will ask for mercy and salvation and eternal life, and anything that is promised to believing sinners, you shall have it. I wish you would try the experiment, for you would find that the Lord never breaks a promise. If you read a promise made to a sinner, it is made to you. Go and plead it, and the Lord will grant it. I will be surety for Him that He will keep His word. Trust Him and try, and thus learn the use of the bow.

God bless you for Christ's sake. Amen.

1695 THE ORPHAN'S FATHER – HOS. 14:3

**A Sermon
Delivered at a Thursday Evening Lecture,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington**

“For in You the fatherless finds mercy.” — Hosea 14:3

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Psalm 68:1-24]

THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL, the one only living, and true God, has this for a special mark of His character, that in Him the fatherless finds mercy. “A Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widows, is God in His holy habitation.” False gods of the heathen are usually notable for their supposed power or cunning, or even for their wickedness, falsehood, lustfulness, and cruelty. But our God, who made the heavens, is the Thrice Holy One. He is the Holy God and He is also full of love. Indeed, it is not only His name, and His character, but His very nature, for “God is love.” Among the acts which exhibit His love is this — that He executes righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed, and especially takes under His wings the defenseless ones, such as the widow and the fatherless.

This is very notable if you look into the subject in connection with Holy Scripture. We see this soon after the giving of the law. We have the law in the 20th chapter of Exodus, and in the twenty-second chapter of the same book, close upon the heels of the law; you have God’s word concerning the fatherless. Listen to Jehovah’s words, they are

strong and forceful, there is a thunder about their sound. “You shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If you afflict them in anywise, and they cry at all unto Me, I will surely hear their cry; and My wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.” These are the words of that Jehovah who spoke the ten commands on Sinai. See how very near to the heart of our God lies the cause of the widow and the fatherless.

The Lord gave the law a second time in the book of Deuteronomy. If you turn to the tenth chapter of that book, at the seventeenth verse, you will find such a statute as this—“For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regards not persons, nor takes reward: He does execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loves the stranger, in giving him food and raiment.” Those are two strong and striking proofs of the fact that the cause of the fatherless lies near to the heart of God.

Laws were made on their behalf, and among the rest was the institution of tithes. I have read some amazing statements upon the divine right of tithes. It seems to be established in the minds of some that if God gave the tithes to Levi He must, therefore, have given them to Episcopalian ministers, an inference which I fail to see. I should just as soon draw the inference that He had given them to Baptist ministers. Certainly it would be no more illogical. The idea of our being priests, or Levites, in order to get compulsory tithes, would be too abhorrent to be entertained for a moment. But while I have often seen the divine right of tithes stated and argued, I have never heard it urged that the tithes should go to those for whom God set them apart under the legal dispensation. Now, if you will turn to Scripture, you will find that the tithe of all the produce of the land was to be given to the Levite and to the stranger, to the widow and to the fatherless, and whenever

tithes come to be properly distributed, if there is any divine right in it at all, it will most certainly be given to the widow and the fatherless. We should agree to its being given in part to the Levite when he turns up, but as we do not know who the Levite is at present, we may keep his portion in abeyance till he appears. But the widow and the fatherless are still here among us, and the poor shall never cease out of the land, and as the institution of the tithe was as much for them as it was for the tribe of Levi, let them have their share. The tribe of Levi had certain rights, because, while the other tribes had each one a portion, that tribe had no inheritance, and therefore took out its share in having a part of the tithe, and certain cities to dwell in. Read Deuteronomy 14:29 — “And the Levite, (because he has no part or inheritance with you), and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within your gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.” I do not know that Episcopalian clergymen have given up their earthly inheritances any more than Non-Conformist ministers, and I cannot therefore see that they have the Levite's claim, but I see clearly the right of the widow and the fatherless, and I pray that the day may come when they will get their share of what is undoubtedly theirs, if it is anybody's at all.

Another ordinance was made about the widow and the fatherless—that when the people gathered in the harvest, if they omitted a sheaf of corn, they were never to go back for it, but were to leave it for the widow and the fatherless. “When you cut down your harvest in your field, and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.” In gathering in the corn the field was not raked, but all that fell, was left to the widow and the fatherless. It was expressly

commanded that when they gathered the grapes they were never to gather a second time, but were to leave bunches to be ripened for the widow and the fatherless. “When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.” Nobody was forgotten in the divine rule when Jehovah was King in Israel; but special mention was continually being made of these two classes — the widow and the fatherless, and the poor strangers that happened to be within Israel’s gates. “You shall be kind to the stranger,” said the Lord, “because you were a stranger in the land of Egypt, and you know the heart of a stranger.” I call your special attention to this, and beg you to look through Scripture, and see how again and again God calls upon His people to take care of the widow and the fatherless. Job, that upright man whom God accepted, denied for himself the charge that he had ever forgotten the widow and the fatherless. And you know how, under the New Testament, it is written, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

It is established, then, that God, even the God of Israel, is one in whom the fatherless finds mercy. Let us take care of them too. “Be you imitators of God as dear children,” and select as the objects of your charity those whom God specially cares for.

This, however, is not my subject at this time. I wish you to become yourselves objects of the divine charity by coming to God as orphans, and putting yourselves under His protection, that you, like the fatherless, may find mercy at His hands. If we are sad at heart, troubled in spirit, full of needs, full of wants and trials, let us be encouraged to come to God, because in Him the fatherless find mercy.

First, here is *encouragement*. Secondly, here is *encouragement as to what to do*. And thirdly, here is *encouragement as to what to expect*.

I. First, here is **ENCOURAGEMENT**. Here is encouragement, though *such as none spy out but needy ones*. You notice that the people who said, “In You the fatherless finds mercy,” are the people who had fallen by their iniquity, and who were bid to return unto the Lord, saying, “Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously.” They were a people who renounced all self-confidence, and cried out, “Ashur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, you are our gods.” They were a people with whom God’s Holy Spirit had so dealt that they were stripped of their pride, and made conscious of their guilt. Then it was that they spied out this precious fact, that in God the fatherless finds mercy. A tear in the eye is a fine thing to clear it. He that never saw his sin has never seen the mercy of God. David never sang of the loving-kindness and tender mercies of God as well as in that 51st Psalm, when he mourned his great sin. A broken-hearted sinner has a sort of instinct for finding out the tender points in God’s character. The ungodly man, who is self-satisfied and has never been made to know the truth about his condition, often likens God to an austere man, reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he has not harvested. But, once let the man, know his guilt and mourn it, and then he looks with all his eyes to God to spy out mercy in Him, and he is the man who delights to learn that God is merciful to the fatherless. This becomes a fountain of hope to him.

Have I here any sin-stricken sinner? Are you desponding and despairing? Did you come here feeling that there could be no mercy for you? Catch at this word. “In You the fatherless finds mercy.” He is a merciful God; He is tender, kind, considerate. He evidently looks after the helpless and hopeless.

He is the patron of those whom others desert. Widows without friends, the fatherless without protectors— these are the care of God. May you not hope that He will care for you? May you not, in the depth of your sin and brokenness of heart, come to Him and say, “O Lord, I hear You are the Friend of the friendless, be a Friend to me”? It looks like a candle put in the window of your father’s house to guide you home through the darkness. May God help you to see it, but I know that you will not care to see it if there is not a tear in your eye, for none but the needy perceive this gracious truth.

This encouragement is, moreover, one which is *a strong inducement to cast away all other confidences*. If God is the Friend of the fatherless, He may be a Friend to me. Would it not be well for me to trust Him, and leave off trusting those other things that I have relied upon? You see how the text runs, “Ashur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses.” These were their great trust and confidence, and then they go on to say— neither will we worship false gods, for we can see that the true God is kind, kind to the fatherless ones and therefore we may come and trust Him. When a man gets some little hope, then he says to himself, “I will even venture to look to the Lord.” When the prodigal son in the far-off country had spent all his living, what was it that brought him back? Why, it was this thought—“How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare!” This made him resolve to go home again. I know what the devil will do; he will tell you that there is no mercy for you. He is an old liar. There is abundant mercy for the greatest sinner. What does the devil know about it? He never sought mercy, and he has never had any, and never will have any, for he will never seek it. But for you, poor soul, there is bread enough and to spare in your Father’s house, and why do you perish with hunger? Why not arise and go to your Father? If God is the Father of the fatherless, this should induce us to

hasten to Him, and rest in Him. “May I trust in Jesus Christ?” asks one. “May I?” Of course you may, it is a sin if you do not, and indeed, the chief and most ruinous of sins. Many of you are trusting in your sacraments and your priests, or in your good works and your prayers, or your own feelings, because you think that you may not trust Christ. But you may! For He who takes the fatherless under His blessed wings invites *you* to come to Him. “Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” If He had ever repulsed one, He might repulse you. But since the fatherless find mercy in Him, and all that come to Him find mercy in Him, come along with you, and trust in the merciful One at once.

Furthermore, there is much encouragement in my text, because *it gives us a clear look into the heart of God*. I always like to see how a man treats children. You learn a great deal about a man when you see that. Some men abhor children, and almost wish that they could exterminate them. As to the fatherless children they say, “Let them go to the workhouse. We cannot be troubled with them.” The gentlehearted one never sees a little child in need without feeling the utmost pity. I feel sorrier for a suffering child than even for a man or a woman. Adults have a measure of a power to help themselves, but if there is poverty in the house, the little one may pine away, but it cannot get relief. Little boys and girls have suffered much in this great city when their parents’ home has been desolated by poverty, frequently caused by drink and other sins. Who knows the sufferings of the little ones when father dies? I confess it touches my heart that little children should suffer as they do. When men are wicked, one is almost thankful that there should be poverty following their sin to whip them out of it, but these lambs, what have they done? Any tender heart feels this. Is not this a wonderful text which lets us gaze into the heart of God while we read, “In You the fatherless finds mercy”? Great God,

the seraphim adore You. Angels, day without night, in serried ranks stand waiting to do Your bidding. Your voice is the thunder, and the glance of Your eye is the lightning. At Your bidding, kings die, dynasties decay, and empires are blotted out, and yet You care for little children and widows. It is very beautiful to me. I feel as if I could trust Him all the better for that, and come with my daily burden and daily cares—yes, and my sins too, and feel sure that He will not refuse me. This is the Father of Jesus, I am sure of it. Oh, how like the Son is to the Father, for if the Father is thus the children's Patron, what think you of the Son, and of His likeness to His Father, when He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven"? Does not this encourage you to come, as you see the heart of God laid bare in the blessed statement of the text, "In you the fatherless finds mercy"?

There is this encouragement too, that *our cases are like those of the widow and the fatherless*. The orphan has no father, no helper, and no means of sustenance. And you, my hearer, are in that state, without God. If there is no God, you have no father. If you have no God to trust to, you have no protector and you are undone. There is no light for you if God is not your light, no hope for you if Christ is not your hope. Do you feel that? Well, then, you are an orphan, you are a fatherless one. Come along, for Jesus has said, "I will not leave you orphans. I will come unto you." Come to Him, and look up into the face of the orphan's Father, and say, I plead that word of Yours, "In You the fatherless finds mercy." Lord, let me find mercy, for my case runs parallel with theirs.

If there is a heart here that needs encouraging, it will spell out my meaning. But if you do not need it, and some of you do not, for you are fine fellows, full of your own righteousness, then I have nothing to say to you but this, "The whole have no

need of a physician, but they that are sick. Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

II. Secondly, for every poor, needy sinner, here is **ENCOURAGEMENT AS TO WHAT TO DO.**

First, if you want to find salvation tonight, take the text as a sort of spiritual guidebook, and *plead your need*. Do not say anything about your merits; the less said about *them* the better. Your position is like that of the Irish servant, who said, when asked for his character references, that the gentleman at his last place told him he would do better without his character than with it. You are just in that case, only that you *will be* asked for your character references, and the best thing you can do is to say, “My character is as bad as it can be,” and then plead for mercy.

“Lord,” it says in the text, “in You the fatherless finds mercy.” It does not say that they are good and holy, but simply that they are fatherless. It does not say that they find reward, but that they find mercy. “Lord, that is all I have to say to You. I am in need — I am in awful need, and because I am such a sinner, it makes my need all the worse, for that is where my need lies. I need righteousness; I need a new heart; I need a right spirit. I need a total change. I need everything, for I have nothing but sin and misery. O Lord, I only urge that as You help the fatherless, simply and only because they are needy, I pray You save me, irrespective of my character, for my need is great.”

The next lesson for you is this, be sure to take a hold of this text by the handle and *ask for mercy*. “In You the fatherless finds”—what? Finds *mercy*, mercy is the handle of the text. When you go to God, ask for mercy, not for justice. A mother once went to the Emperor Napoleon to ask for mercy for her son. He had committed some breach of the French law, and the emperor replied, “Madam, this is the second time the boy

has offended, justice requires that he should die,” She answered, “Sire, I did not come to ask for justice. I beg for mercy.” He answered, “He does not deserve mercy.” “Sire,” she said, “it would not be mercy if he deserved it. I ask for mercy.” When she put it in that way, the emperor replied, “Well, then, I will have mercy.” My unsaved hearer, you deserve to be in hell tonight. It is of the Lord’s mercy that you are not consumed. Do not dream of asking for justice, for justice will be your ruin, but get a hold of this word, “Lord, I ask for *mercy*,” and if something whispers, “Why, you have been a hardened sinner,” say, “Lord, it is true, but Lord, I ask for mercy.” “But you have been a backslider.” Reply, “Lord, yes I have been, but I ask for mercy, on that account.” “But you have resisted and rejected grace.” “Lord that is true, but I shall need all the more mercy because of that.” “But there is nothing in you to argue for forgiveness.” Say, “Lord, I know there is not, and that is why I ask for *mercy*. I put it wholly on that ground. Display Your mercy in me, I beseech You.” That is the way to plead. Mind you keep to it. That is the straight way. You will get heaven so, for you will get Christ so, since His mercy endures forever. “In you the fatherless finds *mercy*.”

Learn another lesson, you that want to get peace with God at once, and I hope that some of you do. *Cast your sin, trial, and sorrow upon God.* The text says, “In You the fatherless finds mercy,” so the business of the fatherless ones is to come to God, and just look to Him for mercy, and that is your business. Do not, I charge you, look to anybody else but the living God to help you. It is a snare, and a horrible one, for people to trust to priests, and I will say, in addition to that, to trust to ministers, to trust to any man whatever. I have known persons when they have heard an address and have been impressed, to say, “Oh, I shall find Christ in the inquiry room!” That inquiry room may be a snare to you if you talk thus. You want to speak to the man

who preached to you, do you? Do not speak to him, go directly to Jesus. “But I wish to see that good man who spoke to me the other day.” Very well, so you may by and by, but mind you do not put that good man or that good woman in the place of Christ. The text says, “*In You* the fatherless finds mercy,” and it is in Christ, and in Him alone, that mercy is to be found. Go directly and distinctly to Jesus, and by the help of His Spirit, you can do that while sitting in the pew. God is everywhere. Let your spirit be conscious that God is present, and now let your heart speak to Him. To Him confess your sin; do not pour that rubbish into the ear of mortal man. To God lay bare your heart, and to Him alone. It is not a fit sight for any human being. Tell the Lord Jesus all your wants and woes, and He will help you, for in the Son of God is the help of the sons of men. Oh, that I knew how to speak these things, but they will surely go home to those who are in spiritual need! You that are not in need, you that are good, you that are self-righteous, will see nothing in the text for you. No, and there was not meant to be, for the Lord has a people that He will draw unto Himself, and these people are known by this—that they are weary of themselves.

God's chosen people exercise the natural art of the weak, namely clinging. They are made to feel their poverty and their need, and then when they hear of the fullness of Christ, they hasten to lay hold on Him. Have you never noticed how the plants that God has made weak are all endowed with a natural faculty for clinging? One of the first things that the vine does is to put forth its tendrils for something to cling to. The hop, the woodbine, the sweet pea, they all have a little hook ready to lay hold on a support. Now, if God is about to bless you at this hour, you have a little tendril that is being put out to find something to lay hold of, and as the gardener carefully puts his stick for the sweet pea, or as the farmer puts his pole for the

hop, I have tried to set my text in your way. I would set the blessed Lord before you, and say, “In Him the fatherless finds mercy, cling to Him, cling to Him. It is your life to do it. Cling firmly!” The limpet by the seashore can do little, but it can cling, and so it does cling, and very firmly too. That is the one thing you can do, poor sinner, and I pray the Holy Spirit to lead you to do it at once. God help you at this moment to cling to Christ, and if you do, you are saved, yes, saved at once. In Him the fatherless finds mercy. Cling to Him, and you shall find mercy too.

III. Now, lastly, here is **ENCOURAGEMENT AS TO WHAT TO EXPECT OF GOD.** “In You the fatherless finds mercy.”

What do the fatherless expect of us when we stand in God's place for them, and take them into our Orphanage, and try to be as a father to them? What do they expect of us? Well, I do not know that the younger ones have intellect enough to know all they expect, but they expect everything. They expect all that they want, and though they do not quite know what they want, they leave it to us. They believe that all will be found that they require. I like a poor Christian who does not know all he wants, but yet knows that his God will supply all his needs. He trusts Jesus for all. He trusts his heavenly Father as a child. He does not know what he may require today, and require in the unknown future, but then his heavenly Father knows, and he leaves it all to Him. As our orphan boys grow older, however, they begin to have a perception of their wants, and they trust that they shall have everything provided which their own fathers would have provided for them, and more, perhaps. So is it with us when we come to the great Father. We say—all that I would provide for my children, if I had everything, and could give them all that wisdom could desire, my God will provide for me, for He will be a Father to me. If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, much more shall He,

who has taken you into His family, though you once were fatherless, give all good things to you. You shall have food and raiment, and sufficient for this life. You shall have protection, guidance, instruction, and tender affection. You shall have a touch or two of the rod every now and then, and that is among your choice mercies, but you shall also have all the cherishing of His sweet love, and by and by, when you are fit for it, He will take you home from school, and you shall see His face, and you shall live forever in His house above, where the many mansions are. Oh, if you come and put yourselves by a simple faith into the blessed custody and keeping of God, He will admit you into His Salvation Orphanage, and He will take care of you, and you shall find Him a better Father than you will be to your own children—a better Father than the best of fathers could ever be to the best beloved of sons. “I will be a Father unto you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” I will not say more, but I should like to leave John’s choice sentence as my last word. “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!” Blessed be Your name, O Lord, that we also have been led of Your Spirit to prove that in You the fatherless finds mercy!

**1696 THE BIRD ESCAPED FROM THE SNARE –
PS. 124:7**

**A Sermon
Delivered at a Thursday Morning Lecture,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington**

**Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers;
the snare is broken, and we are escaped. — Psalm 124:7**

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Psalms 123, 124, and 125]

THIS TEXT DESCRIBES a soul-matter. The Psalmist is not speaking of a temporal deliverance, although even in that sense an escape from death would be a theme worthy of his sweetest song. He says, “*Our soul* is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers,” thus denoting a spiritual rescue. The man’s soul is the soul of the man, and though some give all their attention to the body, their folly is great. It is as though a man should spend all his substance upon his house, and have no bread for himself to eat. Do I speak to any who never think about their souls? Do you really believe that you will die like dogs and horses? I cannot believe that you have such brutal views of yourself. Believe me; you have within you an immortal spirit, which will outlive the sun. If you have up to now been careless of your nobler part, may God’s Spirit teach you wisdom. I pray that you may so think of your soul that our text may become

deeply interesting to you, so that you may join in its song of deliverance.

I have called the text a song, does it not read like one? “*Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we are escaped.*” It is a canticle of certainty. It does not say, “We hope that we have escaped, and we trust that the snare is broken,” but, “The snare is broken, and we are escaped.” “Ifs” and “buts” make no music. Poetry flees when chance enters. Certainties are melodies. We hear people speak of “dead certainties,” but the Christian rejoices in living certainties, and is wretched till they are his own. Rise then, my beloved, above the fogs and mists which cover the marshes of carnal questioning, climb the mountains of full assurance, and stand there with your foreheads bathed in sunlight, breathing that serene atmosphere which is untainted by a cloud of doubt.

The text reads like a song, not only because of its certainty, but also because of its joy. It has the wing and the throat of a lark, see how it rises from the net to God — “Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers.” Soon it takes another rise — “The snare is broken.” And it mounts yet again with still greater joy — “And we are escaped.” The words melt away into the music of heaven as the spirit perfectly escapes from the snares of earth.

The metaphor used in the text is simple, but yet beautiful and instructive. Pardon me if I make as much of it as I am able to do.

First, we have here *the bird*; secondly, *the snare*; thirdly, *the capture*; and fourthly, *the escape*. We may then add *a lesson* from it all.

I. First, we have here the soul compared to **A BIRD**. It is *a little bird* too—a sparrow, or one of the sparrow kind. “Our soul is escaped as a little bird”—not as a great bird, that could break the net, and free itself by its own force. A little bird fitly

represents our soul when we are lowly in heart. In our unregenerate condition we think ourselves eaglets at the very least, but we are not great creatures, after all. We talk of *great* men; we are all little in God's sight. "Lord, what is man, that You are mindful of him?" Sparrows were very cheap in our Lord's day because of their littleness, in the market you could buy two for a farthing, and five for two farthings, so that they threw an odd bird in when you bought at such a wholesale rate as two farthings' worth. Sparrows were inconsiderable things, "yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father." If He cares for sparrows, be sure He cares for souls, and when you think least of yourself, yet believe that the Lord regards you.

Again, our soul is like a little bird because it is so *ignorant*. Birds know little about snares, yet they know so much that, "surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird." Even this slender wisdom is more than men display, for they fly into the net when it is spread in their sight, yes, into the same net out of which, in God's providence, they have just been permitted to escape. Man naturally is the essence of folly, and he is desperately set on destroying himself. He must "see life," he says, and therefore he haunts the gates of death. He reckons the fowler to be his friend, and dreams that he spreads his nets for purposes of friendly hospitality. He does not know that the fowler is hunting for his life, and will destroy him if he can. So foolish are we and ignorant, we are as birds ready for the lure, till the Lord teaches us wisdom, and even then we need hourly keeping, or we are entrapped by the destroyer.

Our soul is often like a little bird because it is so *eager* and *venturesome*. How birds will trust themselves in winter around traps of the simplest kind if but a few crumbs are used as bait! Alas, men are equally foolhardy, they see others perish, yet they follow their ways. Many sip of the intoxicating cup, yet declare they will never be drunks, they pilfer a little, and yet they

despise a thief, they indulge in wanton words, but vow to be chaste as snow, they go into questionable places of amusement, and hope to remain pure. Oh, silly birds! I mean silly souls! Thus the fowler fills his bags. Young people associate with ungodly persons, and say, “We are not so weak-minded as to be led away by them,” thus displaying a weak mind by that boastful speech. Youths tell us that to read skeptical books, impure novels, and to hear lewd songs and spicy language will do them no harm. Believe no such flattering falsehoods, or you will rue the day. “You don’t catch old birds with chaff,” says the simpleton, and he hops into the net. “Younger birds must not come here,” he says, “it is dangerous for them, but I am safe enough.” Yet old birds’ necks are wrung as well as those of young birds, and experienced men are as foolish as the juveniles. When a man says, “It is no temptation to me,” it may be true, for soot will not blacken a sweep. Little birds, beware, the fowler promises pleasure, but the end thereof is death.

The little bird, also, when once taken in the net, is a good comparison with the soul captured by sin, for it is *defenseless*. What can it do? A mouse might eat the ropes and set free the lion, but no mouse will liberate the sparrow. He will have a short flutter, and we shall hear no more of him. When a man is birdlimed by a vice, the more he flutters the tighter he is held by it. What is more defenseless than a soul in the net of sin? What little power men seem to have against their habits! They boast that they can stop anywhere—but, alas, they stop nowhere. “Oh, I have only to come to a determination.” Yes, “only to come to a determination,” but to that determination you will not come. When men become entangled in the meshes of sin, their power to escape is gone. Jeremiah asks—“Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.” Such is the entanglement of habit, the slavery of lust.

While they are thus defenseless, we must notice, too, how *alarmed* they often are. The bird is no sooner in the net than he is frightened. Poor thing, how gladly would he escape if he could! Souls are not always so. They will be taken in Satan's snares, and yet they say that they are happy. Custom in sin kills conscience of sin. "A short life and a merry one," they say, as if there could be any true merriment anywhere except in the great Father's house, where they *begin* to be merry, as if they had never been merry before. Many souls have enough of conscience and of enlightenment by the word, to alarm them when they find themselves entangled in sin, and then they beat about, and hurt themselves, but alas, notwithstanding all their efforts, unless a stronger hand than theirs shall break the net, they will perish by the fowler's hand.

Our souls, once more, are like birds because they are *the objects of snares*. If the Pharisees would compass sea and land to make one proselyte, certainly Satan will compass the entire universe to ruin a single soul, for he delights in destroying the souls of men. Nor is it Satan only, for all the world seems to have taken to this fowling, and men who would not lift a finger to save their fellows will go far to ruin them. Oh, little birds, there is no place on earth safe for you till Jesus covers you with His protecting wings!

II. Secondly, we will now speak of THE SNARE. The text speaks twice of the snare.

It is wonderful what a variety of snares there are for birds. The tombs of Egypt exhibit the art of bird catching, and show us decoys, traps, nets, and so forth. Such arts are still practiced by fowlers. The main point about the snare is that it is *concealed*. So, when the arch-fowler comes after the souls of men, he will not usually spread his net in their sight. Some silly birds can be taken in that way, but most souls need that the temptation should be veiled. Always suspect that in a temptation to sin

there is more than you can see. Never say that it is a little thing, for great evil lurks in a little fault. Death and destruction hide under apparently small offenses. Oh, if we could see everything as God sees it, then we poor silly souls might be in far less danger! But, alas, Satan covers the hook with tempting bait, and we are taken.

Snares and traps are usually *attractive*. The poor bird sees seeds which he is fond of, and he goes for them, little judging that he is to give his life in exchange for brief enjoyment. So is it with Satan. He tempts us with pleasures, with the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. We taste the sweet and are pierced with the smart. Did we perceive the intent of the great enemy of souls, we should fly from sin. You know the old adage, “Fear the Greeks, even when they bring gifts,” even so, fear a temptation to sin, even should it offer you all the kingdoms of this world. May God keep us from the attractions which conceal the snare!

But Satan’s snares, like the fowler’s, are sadly *effectual*. Look at the quantities of small birds that will be found for sale in the markets, fowlers must be exceedingly skillful to catch all these. If we could walk through Satan’s market, what a multitude of souls should we see in his hands! Multitudes upon multitudes are the victims of their own passions, victims of that hellish art which makes evil appear to be good. God save us from being taken in these most deadly snares!

What are these snares? I cannot mention them all, for they are legion. Snares tuck our bed, and snares attend our board. Snares are in the street, and snares are in the field. Snares are on the table, and snares are in our daily walk. But the chief among them are *temptations to sin*. The Evil One endeavors to lead us into a false way, which will be congenial to our taste. We each have a peculiar weakness, and he knows how to adapt himself to it. He has been a student of human nature for so

long a time that he knows more about man than man knows about himself, and he, therefore, chooses that bait which is most likely to attract us. Oh that we may have grace to keep clear of pleasurable sin! The rabbis said to the Nazarite who was not to drink wine or strong drink, “O Nazarite, go about, go about, and do not pass through a vineyard.” So, child of God, it will be well for you to go about, and not enter into temptation. Your Master bids you pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” Against temptation we are to watch and pray as well as against the sin that is likely to come of it.

Another snare is *erroneous doctrine*. There is plenty of that abroad at this time. Be warned. You can have high doctrine, and doctrine low; broad doctrine, and narrow doctrine. You can have it how you like, for nowadays every man makes his own gospel, and sits in judgment upon the Word of God. Dearly beloved, hold fast the truth, and be not decoyed by error. If any come with a new gospel, turn your ear away from their deceptive teaching, for false doctrine is the poison of asps, and the venom of hell lies within them.

Even Christian people are in danger from another snare, namely, *deceitful action*. The tempter whispers, “You need not do evil, but there are different ways of judging right and wrong, and it is best to go by the custom of the trade.” Satan puts things very prettily when he means to ruin us. You have somebody else’s money entrusted to you. Of course, you would not steal it, but you can use it for a little while, and then replace it. It is true, if it should be lost, people will call you a thief, but then you are not going to lose it. You are going to double it by your cleverness. That is the snare. At other times the temptation is in this form—“Be sure to buy the thing if you would like it, though you have no money with which to pay for it.” You would not steal. No, no, there is another way of doing it. Buy it, and do not pay for it. This is one of the snares with

which Satan seduces men, till they are ruined. Ah me, that man should be so moved from their integrity! Oh, child of God, be upright in everything! However well you may gloss a matter over, and however much others may excuse it, yet if a certain act would be wrong in the sight of God, you must not think of it.

I have noticed another snare. Satan tries to get Christian people to *ape the experience of others*. A certain good man is often melancholy. "Ah," says Satan, "that is how you ought to be, you ought to be bowed down with holy sorrow." I remember right well when I was a youth hearing a preacher say that it was dangerous to be sure of our salvation, and he preached up the duty, and beauty, and sweetness of being everlastingly in doubt as to your condition. A few people would gather around such a preacher, and sit and have a little comfortable misery all to themselves, and think that they were worshipping God. Now, that is a snare to a Christian because he has a right to be glad, and "the joy of the Lord is our strength." May we be kept out of that snare! On the other hand, anxious people see Christians who are advanced in grace and full of faith, while they themselves are much cast down, then the Evil One whispers, "You are not like those good men. You are no Christian." Brother, you cannot have another man's experience any more than you can wear another man's face. Certain lovely ferns grow best in the shade, and never flourish in the sun, while many flowers cannot have too much sunlight. Do not wish to be like this man or that man, but pray God to make you like Jesus Christ, and to let your experience glorify His blessed name, otherwise the desire to copy others will be a snare to you.

Thus I might go on mentioning snares. They are some of them gross and carnal, but for the spiritual, there are snares so neat and pretty that they are apt to be taken in them before they are aware. According to Pliny, the nets in which the Egyptians

took little birds were frequently so fine that one person could carry a net large enough to encompass a whole forest. Surely, it must have been a small forest, but even then it is a remarkable statement for so reliable a writer to have made. We may here see an illustration of the delicacy of those temptations with which Satan surrounds the nobler order of minds. Strong as iron, yet filmy as gauze, are the snares for spiritual men. Why, Satan can encompass a whole church with one of those nets, and you scarcely know that it is there, and yet the minds within its meshes are quite unable to mount up and sing unto their Lord, as once they did, for they are within an invisible net.

III. We cannot further dwell on the subject of the snare, but we must turn to consider **THE CAPTURE**. Birds are taken in nets, and souls are taken by temptations to sin, and by errors of doctrine, and by a thousand other methods. Dear friends, it is a dreadful thing for the poor little bird when it is taken, especially when it is so anxious to escape that it hurts itself in its efforts to get free. How came it to be taken?

It may have been taken through *hunger*. Half-starved, it dashed into peril for necessary food. Many true men are in such straits and difficulties that they are sadly liable to be brought into the net. Dear brethren, pray God to deliver you from poverty and from great riches, for there are perilous snares about each of those positions. May you be neither exalted nor depressed, but preserved in the middle path of experience. If you are extremely needy, you may be tempted to do wrong to provide for your wife and family. I pray that you may never yield to the temptation, but trust in God, and He will deliver you without your putting forth your hands unto iniquity.

Other birds are taken merely by their *appetite*. They are not excessively hungry, but they enjoy certain choice seeds, and the fowler knows it, and he scatters such around the trap. Ease of body, indulgence of taste, the joy of being admired, the sweets

of power and position, all these and many more have been the fowler's baits. Hundreds have all that heart ought to wish for, but they need to be rich, and therefore fall into a thousand snares which they might have avoided. Men are snared by eating and by drinking; by fine raiment and by vainglorious display. Snares lie thickly around the appetites of the body and the longings of the mind.

Some persons are entrapped by *fear*. Birds have rushed into the net for fear of danger; many persons have become great offenders against God through lack of moral courage. They are afraid of the laughter of fools. They cannot bear the sarcasm of the so-called wise, and so they suppress truth, and join in sin to escape scorn. God give us a holy bravery with which to defy every man's opinion when we know that we are obeying the Lord.

Some little birds are lost by *love of company*. The fowler has a decoy which sings sweetly or entices pleasantly, and the other birds must follow it. In the church of God we lose many members by ungodly marriages. The worldling pipes his pretty note, and the tender heart is taken by it. The fair enthusiast says, "I shall convert him," but it is very, very seldom that this happens, it is usually the other way. This is a snare of Satan in which many are taken.

Thus you see how souls are captured. Perhaps I am speaking to one here who has flown into the net. You do not know what to do, friend, for you are quite helpless to break your bonds. You went in very eagerly, and oh, how eagerly you would get out again if you could! But you cannot escape. Your own helplessness is now apparent as it never was before. One thing, however, you can do. You can cry to One who is stronger than you. You can pray the Lord to pluck your feet out of the net, and He is able to do it, for all things are possible with Him.

IV. Just a word or two upon **THE ESCAPE**. This is a very blessed text, although the sermon has been gloomy so far, for now we shall see the fowler disappointed and the captive let loose.

I wish that everybody here could repeat the utterance, and cry, "*Our soul is escaped*. We were in the net, but our soul has escaped. The snare is broken, it has no power over us any longer, we are free from its grasp, and we have escaped. Up, up, we soar, away from the fowler and his nets. Glory be to God, we have escaped —

“As when the fowler’s snare is broke,
The bird escapes on cheerful wings
My soul, set free from Satan’s yoke,
With joy bursts forth, and mounts, and sings.”

This escape is due to God alone. As the bird could not get out of the snare, so the soul cannot escape from temptation, but God can bring it out, and He works the rescue. Hear this; you that are slaves to drunkenness, God can deliver you. You that have fallen into licentiousness; hear it—God can deliver you. Whatever the sin that has birdlimed you, those gracious hands which once were nailed to the cross can set you free. Up, up, up, you that pine on the borders of despair! Jesus can deliver you. He that made the world out of nothing can make a joyful Christian even out of you. He can turn your mourning into dancing, and your despair into confidence.

This escape is achieved by power. That word “broken” has force in it. “The snare is broken”—the meshes torn with a strong hand, the steel trap dashed in pieces. It matters not what danger you are in, there is power enough in God to fetch you out of it. I thought once that God could never save *me*. I supposed that He would bless my brother and my sisters, but that He would

leave me, yet He did save me, blessed be His name! And you, too, He is able to deliver. "Oh, but I am the odd man," cries one. Then there are two of us, and if God has saved one odd man, He can surely save another, and why should He not save you, despite all your eccentricity? "But I do not think that He will save me." What are your thoughts worth? He can save even you. Only trust Him, though you are in the net, and out of that net you shall be fetched, for He leaves no soul to perish that puts its trust in Him.

Observe that *the escape was complete*, "the snare is broken, and we are escaped." As long as a little bird has the tiniest bit of cotton tied to its leg, and that is fastened anywhere, the bird has not escaped. And as long as you have one evil habit—one wrong thing that you really love—you have not clean escaped. You must be altogether separated from your sins. No man can be married to Christ till he is divorced from sin. Our deliverance must be complete, or it is not true. Who can give us this but the Lord Jesus Christ by His blessed Spirit? Trust Him to set you free, and no net shall hold you.

I would again put the question, "How many of us can say, 'We have escaped?'" Let us sing unto the Lord if we can, and let those who cannot say that they are free, continue to plead earnestly with God that He would deliver them.

V. I would close with **THE LESSON** which this subject ought to teach us; a word or two only.

It ought to teach us, first, *to sing*, for, if a bird gets out of the net does it not sing? How glad it seems to be when once it flies away! Oh, you that have been delivered from sin and Satan, sing unto the Lord! Praise and bless His name. Be as happy as possible. Be something more than full of happiness. How can that be? Why, be so full of it that it overflows and cheers others. Let us communicate our joy as far as ever we can, for we are

escaped. We are escaped, and we will praise the blessed God who broke the snare.

Next, *let us trust*, for if the Lord has saved us from the dreadful snare of sin and Satan, He will save us from everything else. It is sad to me that any should trust the Lord with their souls, and yet they cannot trust Him for their daily bread, or for help in their daily trials. This must not be. If the Lord has given our soul so great an escape, depend upon it He will take care of our bodies. He that gave us Jesus will give us food and raiment, and let us be content with that.

Lastly, *let us watch*. If we have fallen into the snare once, let us keep our eyes open not to go there again. May the Holy Spirit prevent any child of God from turning aside even for a moment from the way that is straight. "Let them not turn again to folly," is one of God's own cautions to His people. He has brought you up out of the horrible pit; do not play near the edge of it. He has set your feet on a rock, what have you to do with the miry clay? Get away from the slippery ground, and let your goings be established on the rock.

I would say again to you netted ones—you that are really caught in the trap and held fast, oh, that the Lord would come at once, and set you free! I think He will, yes, I am sure that He will if you cry to Him to do so. I have heard of a sailor who had been in prison, that after his release, he had money in his pocket, and going over London Bridge, he saw a man selling birds—thrashes, larks and so on. "What do you want for the lot?" said Jack. I forget how much it was, but Jack found the money, and as soon as the birds were his, he opened the door and let them all fly away. The man called out "Whatever did you buy those birds for, and then let them out?" "Oh," said the sailor, "if you had been in prison as I have been, you would be sure to set everything free you could get a hold of." You and I ought to display the same kind of feeling towards all poor bondaged

souls. I am sure that the Lord Jesus Christ is more tenderhearted than we are, and therefore He will certainly come and set free all prisoners who beg Him to open their cage doors. He is the great Emancipator, show Him your bonds, and beg for liberty, and He will grant it to you.

1697 THE WORD OF A KING – ECCL. 8:4

A Sermon Delivered
at the Opening of a New Baptist Chapel, Trinity
Road, Upper Tooting,
by the
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
At The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

Where the word of a king is, there is power. —
Ecclesiastes 8:4

[Scripture Read before Sermon – Psalm 19]

KINGS IN SOLOMAN’S DAY had a vast amount of power, for their word was absolute. They did according to their own will, and none could check them, for as Solomon said, “the king’s wrath is as the roaring of a lion: whoever provokes him to anger sins against his own soul.” When such a monarch happened to be wise and good, it was a great blessing to the people, for “a king that sits in the throne of judgment scatters away all evil with his eyes.” But if he was of a hard, tyrannical nature, his subjects were mere slaves, and groaned beneath a yoke of iron. We do not sufficiently give thanks for the blessings of a constitutional government, but if we were for a season put beneath the power of a grinding despotism, we should set more store by those liberties for which we have to thank our Puritan ancestors. Mercies are seldom appreciated till they are taken away. May we not prove ungrateful under free institutions, for if so, we shall be more brutish than any men.

There is, however, blessed be the Lord, one King whose power we do not wish in any degree to limit or circumscribe. God does as He wills among the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of this lower world, none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What are you doing? In this we greatly rejoice. The personal rule of one individual would be the best form of government if that individual were perfectly good, infinitely wise, and abundant in power. And the reason why an autocrat turns into a despot is that there is no man who is perfectly good, unselfish, or wise. God has no fault or failing, and therefore it is a joy that He does according to His will. He never wills anything that is not strictly just. In the exercise of absolute sovereignty He is neither unjust nor unmerciful, it is not possible for Him to err, and therefore it is a great subject for joy that “the Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty. The Lord sits upon the floods; yes, the Lord sits King forever and ever; let Israel rejoice, and let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. “Say among the heathen that the Lord reigns: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: He shall judge the people righteously. Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the seas roar, and the fullness thereof.”

Now, because God is the absolute Monarch, His word has power about it, and of that word of power I am going to speak at this time. May the Holy Spirit help us to think of the power of God’s Word for four purposes—first, *to excite our awe*, secondly, *to ensure our obedience*, thirdly, *to inspire our confidence*, and fourthly, *to direct our efforts*.

I. First, we would see the power of the word of the Lord in order **TO EXCITE OUR AWE OF HIM**. What are we poor creatures of a day? What is there in us as we appear in God’s sight? Do we not pass away as the flower of the field? As for *our* word, what is it? We sometimes talk exceedingly proudly, and we say, “shall” and “will” as if *we* could do anything, when,

after all, our word is but breath, a vapor, a mere sound in the air. Man proposes, but God disposes; man resolves, but God dissolves, that which man expects God rejects, for the word of the Lord stands forever, but man passes away and is not. Think of the day before all days when there was no day but the Ancient of days, and when God dwelt all alone. Then He willed in His mind that there should be a world *created*. “He spoke, and it was done: He commanded, and it stood fast.” “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the hosts of them by the breath of His mouth.” What a word is that which created all things! And remember that this same word can *destroy* all things, for “the heavens and the earth, which now are, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” If He were but to speak, all things that are would melt away as a moment’s foam dissolves into the wave that bears it, and is lost forever. “You turn man to destruction; and say, Return, you children of men,” and at that irresistible word man’s spirit returns to God who gave it, and his body disintegrates into dust.

When the Lord created He used no hand of cherubim or seraphim. All that we read in the sublimely simple record of Genesis is, “God said, let there be,” and there was. His word accomplished all, and when He wills to destroy one man or a million, His word is able to work His will. What a mighty word was that which in one night cut off the host of Sennacherib, and slew the first-born of Egypt! The word of the Lord commanded the floods, and they drowned a guilty world, and that same word rained fire from heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Even so in the last day, when the word shall go forth from Him, He shall shake not only the earth, but also heaven, and at His word of power both heaven and earth shall flee away. Great God, we do adore You, for You are both Creator and Destroyer by Your word!

Think how *God's word both makes alive and kills*. He promised Abraham that he should have a seed in which all the nations of the earth should be blessed. It seemed impossible that there should come from him a son that should be the founder of a race—his body was dead, and Sarah was old—yet God in due time made them to laugh, for Isaac was born into the house. “The Lord sets the solitary in families.” “He makes the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children.” It is the Lord who makes alive, and equally is it the Lord who kills. It only needs God to will it and the pestilence lays men low in heaps, like the grass of the meadow when the mower's scythe has passed over it. The Lord has but to call for pestilence or war, and myriads of men are laid low. If He wills to chasten by famine, He calls for devouring insects, and they invade the land. And this Joel attributes to the word of Jehovah, when He says, “And the Lord shall utter His voice before His army; for His camp is very great: for He is strong that executes His word: for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?” Oh, how we ought to worship You, You dread Supreme, upon whose word life and death are made to hang!

I might in another division of this part of my subject remind you of the power which attends both *His promises*, and *His threats*. God has never promised without performing in due time to the last jot and tittle. Has He said, and shall He not do it? Has He commanded, and shall it not come to pass? The gifts and calling of God are without repentance; He turns not from His covenant engagements, and swerves not from the performance of His word. Those that have resisted Him have found His threats to be true also. Let Pharaoh confess how the plagues followed fast upon the word of the Lord till even his stout heart was melted within him. Men have gone on for a while resisting God, and in their pride they have laughed Him to scorn, but by and by He has spoken to them in His wrath,

and vexed them in His hot displeasure. Who can stand against this terrible God, whose word overthrows the mighty, and casts the proud beneath His feet?

There is power in God's Word to foretell, so that, when He tells what is to be in the future, we know that it shall come to pass. "Seek you out of the book of the Lord, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate." Thus says the Lord, "I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it." In the word of the Lord *there is also power to predestinate* as well as to foretell, so that what He decrees is fixed and certain. "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." The Lord has said it, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure." Let this be your joy today, that whatever is promised of the latter day, and of the glory that is to be revealed, is sure to come to pass, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. It seems impossible that the heathen should ever be the Lord's, or that the uttermost parts of the earth should be Christ's possession, but it will be, for the King has said it, and "Where the word of a king is, there is power." We fear that the time will never arrive when peace shall reign through all the world, and when men shall hang the helmet in the hall, and study war no more; but the vision of faith shall yet become a fact, for "Where the word of a king is, there is power." He spoke of old of Edom and Moab, Philistia and Ammon, Nineveh and Babylon, Greece and Rome, and whatever He has spoken has been fulfilled. Not one word of the prophecies of Daniel and Ezekiel has failed of its accomplishment, and we may be sure that not one glorious vision of the seer of Patmos will remain a dream. Let us worship the great Ordainer, Benefactor, and Ruler, who's every word, is the word of a king, in which there is power

“His very word of grace is strong
As that which built the skies
The voice that rolls the stars along
Speaks all the promises.”

II. Secondly, we would think of the power of God’s Word in order **TO ENSURE OUR OBEDIENCE TO IT**. Whenever God gives a word of command it comes to us clothed with authority, and its power over our minds should be immediate and unquestioned. I hope that in laying the foundation of the spiritual building that is to be erected in connection with this place, you will take care to do it according to the directions of the Divine statute-book. One is our Master, even Christ, and we have to do our Master’s will, not our own. Some Christian people do not view the authority of God’s Word as paramount, but consult human leaders or their preferences. This is to begin with the word of man, a weak and sandy foundation, I beseech you do not so. To Christians the Word of God is the only rule of faith and practice. Our doctrine is of authority because it is God’s Word, and for no other reason. Our ordinances are valid because instituted by God’s Word; they are idle ceremonies if they are not so commanded. All the rites, rules, and regulations of man are of no value. The book of human decrees is not to be regarded in the church of Christ. You may put in the front of it, “printed by authority,” but to the church of Christ it has no authority. You may adopt a creed as the standard of any particular church, but that gives it no authority to bind the conscience. It may be authorized by princes, bishops, and holy men, but where it differs from the word of the Lord, or adds thereto, it is to the children of God as a puff of wind. The sole authority in the church is Christ Himself. He is the Head of His church, and His word is the only authority by which we are ruled, for “where the word of a king is, there is power,” but all

are usurpers who act as lords in the church, where Jesus alone is Master and Lord. Christians should more diligently search the word to find out what the will of the Lord is on all matters affecting their everyday life. A loyal subject of the great King wants to know what the King would have him do. When he knows it, it is not for him to question or to quibble, but to obey. Brethren, let us obey in all things the King's word, and give to His holy word the honor that it justly claims, for "where the word of a king is, there is power." Every precept that He gives He intends us to keep, He does not ordain it that we may question it; He commands that we may obey.

Let me refer you to what Solomon says in the second verse of this chapter, "*I counsel you to keep the king's commandments.*" This is admirable counsel for every Christian. If the commandment were of men, even the wisest of men, we might break it, and perhaps do right in breaking it. But if they are of the King who gives the command, even the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the King in Zion, then the advice of the Preacher is wise and weighty—"I counsel you to keep the king's commandment." Perhaps some of you would ask me this afternoon, "What is the best course for me to pursue in certain difficult cases?" "I counsel you to keep the King's commandment." "But I am a young man just beginning life, and may get into trouble if I am rigidly scrupulous in doing that which is right." "I counsel you to keep the King's commandment." "But at this present time I may lose my job if I keep *all* His statutes. Could I not wink rather hard and forget one of the commandments for a little while?" "I counsel you to keep the King's commandments." If He is a King, then it is a solemn hazard to your soul if you come short of the least of His commandments. Remember that one treason makes a traitor; one leak sinks a ship; one fly spoils the whole box of ointment. He that bought us with His blood deserves to be obeyed in all things with all our heart, and mind,

and soul and strength. Such a King as we have ought never to hear us ask the reason why He commands, but we should be like the brave men of Balaclava, of whom the poet said —

“Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs but to dare and die.”

Solomon goes on to say, *“Be not hasty to go out of his sight.”* There is such power in God’s Word that I would have you also obey this precept, and seek to remain in His presence. Some of His people seek to get away from their Lord instead of keeping close to Him. So little do they delight in communion with their God that they seem to say, “Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence?” Did it never happen to you as it did to Jonah, when he felt he had to go to Tarshish, though the Lord told him to go to Nineveh? He did not want such a large field of labor, such an anxious and unrewarding post of duty. He would rather go to a village station, or to a seaside place. For a time he believed that providence helped him, for he found a ship going to Tarshish. There are many devils’ providences which make sin easy and obedience difficult. The precept, not the providence, is the rule of duty. The providence which gave Judas the opportunity to sell his Master did not excuse that son of perdition. “So he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.” Alas, poor Jonah! To be thus eager to run counter to the word of a King! I remember how I felt when first in London. I could not endure the horrible wilderness of bricks by which I was surrounded. I sighed for the green fields and the fresh air, and longed to get back to my country charge. But this kind of self-indulgence will not do. “Where the word of a king is, there is power,” and wherever

the King sends you, you must go, and go without questioning. If He should send you to preach at the gates of hell, go and preach there. “Be not hasty to go out of His sight,” for if you get out of the sight of the King, if you no longer wait in His blessed presence, depend upon it, like Jonah, you will fall into trial, tempest, sinking, and terror. There may be no whale to swallow you, and cast you up, again, they are not as plentiful now as they were then, and you may not be delivered so easily as Jonah. Keep in the Lord’s presence and favor, no matter where you may have to go in order to do so. Walk in communion with Christ in whatever path He may point out to you. Never mind how rough it is. Do not imagine it is the wrong road because it is so rough; rather reckon it to be right because it is rough, for seldom do smoothness and rightness go together. Oh, to abide in Christ the Word, and to have His word abiding in us!

Solomon then says, “*Stand not in an evil thing.*” There is such power in the Word of God that He can readily destroy you, or heavily chastise you, therefore be quick to amend, and “stand not in an evil thing.” Repent, obey, submit, confess, and seek pardon at once. He who is a courtier in a king’s court, if he offends against his sovereign, or does anything disgraceful, apologizes, and trusts that he will not so offend any more, and oh, you child of God, if at any time you shall offend against your gracious Sovereign, and He frowns on you, humble yourself, for His stroke is heavy. “Be you not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle.” Have a tender mouth, let God guide you with His eye, let a word be enough for you, do not need a bit or bridle. I wish we all had great tenderness of conscience. We should tremble at God’s Word, and humble ourselves in the dust before Him, praying to be cleansed by His grace. If a person wished to practice deeds of infamy, he would

not do it in the Queen's audience room, especially if her eyes were fixed upon him. And so sin should be impossible to a believer who lives in the presence of the King, in whose word there is power. Will you offend Him to His face, and slight Him in His own courts? No, yield yourself to His mercy, and let your holy life prove that His word has power over your heart and conscience.

III. And now, thirdly, **TO INSPIRE OUR CONFIDENCE**, let us think that “where the word of a king is, there is power.” If there is *a heart here that is seeking mercy*, if you can go before God with such a promise as this in your mouth, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon”—that word of His is not a mere sound, there is the power of truth in it. If you do what He there bids you do, you shall find that He can and will abundantly pardon. Whatever sins you have committed, though they are too many to count, and too awful to mention, if you will come and trust yourself with Jesus Christ, God's Word is that you shall be saved, and saved you shall be. “He that believes on Him is not condemned.” “He that believes on the Son has everlasting life.” Come and plead these words now, you who feel your sinfulness, and you shall prove in your joyful experience that they are the power of God unto salvation. Even the very worst may come and plead the promises, and they shall obtain immediate pardon and full forgiveness, and their soul shall know it because of the sweet peace that comes from forgiven sin.

Do you tell me that *you cannot conquer your evil passions and corrupt desires*? Here is a promise from the word of the Lord, “From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.” Now come and plead these precious promises,

there is power in them, they are the words of a King, and if you plead them at the mercy seat, you shall become a new creature in Christ Jesus. Old things shall pass away. All things shall become new. When you get a promise from God, treat it as undoubted truth, and rely upon it as you do upon the promise of your father or your friend. There are men around you whose promises you never can believe, when they promise to pay you, you dare not regard it as an asset in business, for you are too sadly aware that you have a little bundle of their I O U's already, and you have had a view of their dishonored bills, and checks endorsed with "insufficient funds." But God's Word is not like that of false and fickle mortals. No charge of falsehood or failure can be brought against the God of truth. He has never broken His word yet, and He never will. Then, dear souls, if you need forgiveness of sin and renewal of heart, get the promise to that effect, and believe it with all your soul, and as sure as it is the word of a King you shall be washed in the blood and in the water which flowed from the wounded side of the crucified Christ.

And you Christian people, are there any of you who are struggling at this time with *a remaining corruption which you cannot conquer*? Now come and lay hold of the promise that you shall overcome, and plead it before the mercy seat. If you do but get any promise of God suited to your case, make quick use of it, for there is power in it. It is the word of a King! Mr. Durham, the writer of ancient and precious comments upon Solomon's Song and the Revelation, when dying, was somewhat distressed in mind, and said to a friend who was standing by his bedside, "Out of all the Scriptures there is not one text that yields me comfort, save only one, and that is one that I have often held out to perishing sinners, little thinking I should have to cling to it myself—'him that comes unto Me I will in no wise cast out.' Brother So-and-So, do you think that this is strong enough to

bear my weight now?” “Yes,” his friend replied, “and to bear the weight of ten thousand times ten thousand if they rest upon it.” What was said of that text is true of every other Word of God. The promise of the Lord will bear the weight of sin and justice, life and death, judgment and hell. Lean your whole weight on the word, and you shall find it to be like Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abides forever. For my own part, I have no shadow of a hope but in the word of the Lord. His Spirit has delivered me from all reliance upon duties, or feelings, or experiences. The word of the Lord is the life of my soul. In the words of King Jesus there is power to save you, to renew you, to pardon you, to preserve you, to sanctify you, and to perfect you. If you have hold on the promises, they will hold you for time and eternity too.

Then, also, *are there any of you in great trouble?* I cannot know all your cases, but if any one of you has a trial which you could not tell, or a trouble, which if you did tell it, nobody could help you out of, go and spread it before the Lord. Remember His word, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivers him out of them all.” Go and tell Him that He has thus spoken, and that He has therein pledged Himself to deliver you out of all afflictions, and be sure of this, He will be as good as His word.

Do you expect to die soon? Are you somewhat distressed because sickness is undermining your constitution? Be not afraid, for His Spirit teaches you to sing, “Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff they comfort me.” Go and tell the Lord of His own word, and you will look forward to death without fear, singing —

“Knowing as I am known,
How shall I love that word,
And oft repeat before the throne,
‘Forever with the Lord!’
That resurrection word,
That shout of victory,
Once more, ‘Forever with the Lord!’
Amen—so let it be!”

Brethren, one more point is gained concerning the fear of death when we remember that it is the voice of a King which will recall our bodies from the grave, and “where the word of a king is, there is power.” Do we ask mournfully as we survey the graveyard, “Can these dry bones live?” We are not slow to answer with assurance of faith. He that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, will also bring forth from their sepulchres all His sheep. “If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwells in you.” We do not doubt this when we remember that with the trumpet of the archangel shall also be heard the voice of God, which voice shall speak the word omnipotent —

“Break from His throne, illustrious morn!
Attend, O earth, His sovereign word!
Restore the saint, a glorious form
He must ascend to meet his Lord.”

IV. Fourthly, I am coming to my last point, on which I shall crave a little time, and here I intend to address myself to all people of God who are associated in church fellowship, and striving to do the Lord’s service, and to you who will be so

associated here. My text is to be used **TO DIRECT YOUR EFFORTS**. You need power; not the power of money, or mind, or influence, or numbers, but “power from on high.” All other power may be desirable, but this power is indispensable. Spiritual work can only be done by spiritual power. I counsel you in order to get spiritual power in all that you do to keep the King’s commandment, for “where the word of a king is, there is power.” Lay not a stone of your spiritual church without His overseeing. Do all things according as He has ordained. Regard Him as the wise Master Builder, and be all of you under the command of His word.

The day comes when much that has been built shall be destroyed, for the fire will try every man’s work of what sort it is. It is very easy to heap up a church with wood, hay, and stubble, which the fire will soon destroy, and it is very difficult work to build one up with gold, silver, and precious stones, for these are rare materials, and must be diligently sought for, laboriously prepared, and carefully guarded. The materials that will stand the fire of temptation, trial, death, and the like, are not to be brought together by any word but the word of the Lord, but these alone are worth having. I had sooner have half-a-dozen Christian people, truly spiritual and obedient to the word of the Lord in all things, than I would have half-a-dozen thousands, of nominal Christians, who neither care about the word, nor the King. If you need power, keep the King’s commandment, keep close to them in all things, and make it the Law of your house and the slogan of your flag. Wherein you go beyond the word, you go beyond the power, and wherein you stop short of the word, you also stop short of the power. In the King’s word there *is* power, and you will have power as long as you keep to it. But real power is nowhere else to be found.

Let us take care that we do not look elsewhere for power, for that will be leaving the fountain of living waters to hew out for ourselves broken cisterns which hold no water. I fear that some Christian people have been looking in many other directions for the power which can only be found in the word of the King. At one time we were told that power lay in an educated ministry. People said, "We must have a minister who knows Greek and Latin. You cannot save souls unless you are familiar with the heathen classics." This superstition has suffered many a blow from the manifest successes of those whose only language is the grand Old Saxon. Then the cry was, "Well, really, we do not need these men of education, we need fluent speakers, men who can tell a great many anecdotes and stories, these are men of power." I hope we shall outgrow this delusion also. The Lord works by either of these classes of men, or by others who have not the qualifications of either of them, or by another sort of men, or 50 sorts of men, so long as they keep to the word of the King, in which there is power. There is power in the gospel if it is preached by a man utterly without education; unlearned men have done great things by the power of the word. The polished doctor of divinity has been equally useful when he has kept to his Master's word. But if either of these has forgotten to make Christ's word first and last, the preaching, has been alike powerless, whether uttered by the illiterate or the profound.

Others have thought it necessary, in order to have power among the masses (that is the hypocritical phrase), that there should be fine music. An organ is nowadays thought to be the power of God, and a choir is a fine substitute for the Holy Spirit. They have tried that kind of thing in America, where solos and quartets enable singing men and singing women to divide their services between the church and the theater. Some churches have paid more attention to the choir than to the preaching. I

do not believe in it. If God had meant people to be converted in that way, He would have sent them a command to attend the music halls and operas, for there they will get far better music than we can hope to give them. If there are charms in music to change the souls of men from sin to holiness, and if the preaching of the gospel will not do it, let us have done with Peter and Paul, with Chalmers and with Chrysostom, and let us exalt Mozart and Handel into their places, and let the great singers of the day take the places of the pleaders for the Lord. Even this would not content the maniacs of this age, for with the music room they crave the flippancy of the theater. Combine with philosophy the sweet flowers of oratory and those of Covent Garden, adding thereto the man-millinery and baubles of Rome, and then you can exclaim, with the idolaters of old, "These are your gods, O Israel." Men are now looking for omnipotence in toys. But *we* do not believe it. We come back to this, "Where the word of a king is, there is power," and while we are prepared to admit that all and everything that has to do with us can be the vehicle of spiritual power if God so wills, we are more than ever convinced that God has spiritual power to give by His word alone. We must keep to the King's word if we desire to have this spiritual power for the Lord's work.

Whatever you find in Scripture to be the command of the King, follow it, though it leads you into a course that is difficult for the flesh to bear. I mean a path of singular spirituality, and nonconformity to the world. Remember that, after all, the truth may be with the half-dozen, and not with the million. Christ's power may be with the handful as it was at Pentecost, when the power came down upon the despised disciples and not upon the chief priests and scribes, though they had the sway in religious matters.

If we want to win souls for Christ we must use the Word of God to do it. Other forms of good work languish unless the gospel is joined with them. Set about reforming, civilizing, and elevating the people, and you will lose your time unless you evangelize them. The total abstinence movement is good, and I would that all would aid it, but it effects little unless the gospel furnishes the motive and the force. It will win its way in proportion as it is carried on in subordination to the gospel, and is viewed as a means to reach a still higher end. The rod works no wonder till Moses grasps it, and moral teaching has small force till Jesus operates by it. Those who doubt the power of the gospel, and leave it for other forms of hopeful good, leave strength for weakness, omnipotence for insufficiency. More and more I am persuaded that it is where the word of a King is that there is power, and all the rest is feebleness until that word has infused might into it. Everyone must buy his own experience, but mine goes to prove to me that the direct and downright preaching of the gospel is the most profitable work which I ever engage in. It brings more glory to God and good to men than all lecturing and addressing upon moral subjects. I should always, if I were a farmer, like to sow that seed which would bring me the best return for my labor. Preaching the gospel is the most paying thing in the world. It is remunerative in the very highest sense. May your minister stick to the gospel, the old-fashioned gospel, and preach nothing else but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. If people will not hear *that*, do not let them hear anything at all. It is better to be silent than to preach anything else. Paul said, and I will say the same, “I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”

Then again, if you need power, *you must use this word in pleading*. If your work here is to be a success, there must be much praying, everything in God's house is to be done with

prayer. Give me a praying people, and I shall have a powerful people. The word of the King is that which gives power to our prayers. I have been requested to preach, in certain places, and I have replied that I could not go. In a little time I have received a letter to remind me that, two years before I promised to go. This altered the case. I had no choice. I *must* go, whether I could or not, for my word was pledged to it. So, if you can go to the Lord with His pledged word and say, “Lord, You have said it, You must do it,” He will be true to His word to you, for there is power in the word of a king.

There is power in *accepting that word*, in getting it into you, or receiving it. You will never keep the truth till you have received this word of a King into your spiritual being, and absorbed it into your spiritual nature. Oh, that you might every one of you eat the word, live on it, and make it your daily food!

And then, there is power in the *practicing of it*. Where there is life through the King’s word, it will be a strong life. The sinner’s life is a feeble life, but an obedient life, an earnest Christian life, a life of strength. Even those who hate it and abhor it cannot help feeling that there is a strange influence about it which they cannot explain, and they must respect it.

You will see its power in this place. I know you will see it, for you are resolved, in God’s strength that it shall be so. You will see its power *to fill the place*. There is nothing as attractive as the gospel of Christ. If you were to give a man the Tabernacle at Newington, and say to him, “There, you may lecture on geology, astronomy, or anything you like, twice on the Sunday, and every night in the week as well, if you please, and see if you can keep up a full congregation,” he would fail. The people would not come for any length of time, and yet without any great oratory we preach the gospel again and again, and the people come, they cannot help it. They hear nothing new; it is always the same thing over and over again, and yet it is never

monotonous. There is always a glorious freshness about the gospel. That one silver bell of the gospel has more melody in it than can be drawn from all the bells in all the steeples in the world. There is more sweetness in that one name Jesus, than in all the harps of angels, let alone the music of men. When Jesus Christ's deity is denied in any chapel, it soon becomes a howling wilderness. If Christ, the Son of God, is gone, all is gone. A certain minister preached Universalism, or the doctrine that everybody would be saved in the end and after a time his chapel became empty. His neighbor, who preached that those who did not believe would be lost forever, had his house full. One day the Universalist met his neighbor, and asked him, "How is it that the people come to you when you preach that unbelievers will be sent to hell, and they do not come to me though I tell them that in the end they will all be in heaven?" The other replied, "They suspect that what I tell them is true, and that what you tell them is false." Where gentlemen of this order have been preaching, people have sense enough to come to the conclusion that if what they say is false it is not wise to hear them, and if what they say is true there is no need to hear them. Certain gentlemen are proving to the world that there is no need of themselves, for if men are not lost what need is there of a preacher to tell them how they can be saved? He that cries peace and safety, if he is a watchman, might as well hold his tongue. If the watchman woke you up in the middle of the night crying out, "All's well! A fine starlight night!" you would be very much inclined to exclaim, "Why on earth do you go about disturbing people when there is nothing the matter? Go home and get to bed with you!" And thus these smooth-speaking gentlemen are finding out that they are not needed, and people are ready to say of them, "Let them go home to bed, and there let them abide." But on the other hand, if you preach

Jesus Christ, and even the terrible things of His word, there will be a full house, for conscience bids men hear.

When you preach the gospel, *souls will be saved*. To secure that end you must stick to the gospel, for that is the one means ordained by God for the conversion of sinners. The other day a gospel minister spoke to a woman who had attended certain revival services, in which there was much shouting of “Come to Jesus,” but nothing about Jesus. She said, “I heard you preach this afternoon, and if what you preached is true, then I am a lost woman. I have been converted ten times already.” Ah me! What is the use of such poor work as this? We must teach the King’s word if our work is to be blessed to the salvation of souls. We must plow with the law, and let the people know what sin means, and what repentance means, and then we may hopefully sow them with the gospel. Some time ago we were told that there was no need of repentance, and that repentance only meant a change of mind. But what tremendous change of mind true repentance means! Never speak lightly of repentance.

Then, too, the preaching of the truth, and the whole truth, *will bring a power of union among you*, so that you who love the Lord will be heartily united. When Christian people quarrel, it is generally because they do not get sufficient spiritual food. Dogs fight when there are no bones, and church members fall out when there is no spiritual food. We must give them plenty of gospel, for the gospel has the power of sweetening the temper, and making us put up with one another.

Preach the King’s word, for it will give you power in private prayer, power in the Sunday school, power in the prayer meeting, power in everything that you do, because you will live upon the King’s own word and His word is meat to the soul. The prophet said, “Your words were found, and I did eat them; and Your word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.”

If you try this meat, you will all find it is nourishing to you also.
The Lord bless you, and grant that it may be so. Amen.